

ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION OF *GO'EL* IN THE MALAGASY BIBLE

CASE STUDY: THE BOOK OF RUTH

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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MAY 2018



To my dear husband, Serge Razafinjatony.

Am-pitiavana.

Great is Your faithfulness.

– Lamentations 3:23

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks goes to my two doctoral advisors at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary: Bryan Harmelink, a wise and gentle leader who tirelessly cheered me up and encouraged me to move on, whose valuable advice and guidance helped me to keep my focus on finishing well, and Roy Ciampa, who always encourages his students to strive for the best. Thank you.

Thanks to my classmates who were far more than cohort members and friends and became part of my life. Our journey together will always be treasured.

I want to express my gratitude to those who invested financially in this particular endeavor so that I could go for further studies. You are part of the miracles that happened to me, and by extension to all the people we all serve together.

My appreciation goes to the long list of dear people whose invaluable prayers, pastoral care, and support in one way or another during this journey of studies made it possible to reach this stage. Each one of you are precious to me.

And to the one who walked closely with me from the beginning, who was and is always there for me, who would wake up at night just to listen to me and to challenge me to continue, who would unceasingly pray for me, who endured my complaints and poured his love to me unconditionally, words are not enough to express how grateful I am for having you in my life. Serge, you are the best. My victory is yours. Misaotra indrindra!



My first, foremost, and deepest gratitude goes to my Abba Father for it is by His grace that I reach this point. From the beginning of my studies, each step is a miracle and a sign of His grace and faithfulness. I owe it all to You, Lord.

## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in grammatical glosses.

ACT	Active
Adj	Adjective
Adv	Adverb
cond.	Conditional
DEM	Demonstrative
det.	Determiner
FUT	Future tense
impv.	Imperative
LOC	Locative
PASS	Passive
PAST	Past tense
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive
PREP	Preposition
PRES	Present tense
3SG	3rd person Singular

## ABSTRACT

There are so many cultural concepts that are far from our present understanding in the Bible. One of them is גֹּאֵל (*go'el*) or kinsman-redeemer. This thesis-project presents the analysis of the translation of גֹּאֵל in the Malagasy Bible, not only because of the significant similarity between the Jewish and the Malagasy cultures on that particular cultural aspect, but also because of the improvement that could be suggested to the actual rendering of the concept in the Malagasy Bible. The book of Ruth constitutes a good foundation for this study because, apart from being a very well-known true story, it is a book that is rich in culture. Levirate marriage holds an important place in the story and at the same time, kinsman-redeemer or גֹּאֵל is a masterpiece in the book. These two concepts are highly relevant in understanding the book of Ruth and are important building blocks for a biblical understanding of the concept of redemption.

The expected outcome of this thesis-project is to prove that a good translation communicates not only the translated concept as a word but its real meaning in its original context translated in the audience's context.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING**

#### **Introduction**

One of my roles as a Bible Translation Consultant is to help translators think through their translation work so that they would produce a translation that is faithful to the original text. That involves good understanding of the original text, good exegesis, and good understanding of the original context (the context of the passage) and the present receptors' context.

Today people have the advantage of getting detailed information of what they are reading in the Bible because of the availability of and the access to different helps. Yet so many readers still do not understand God and His Word because the Word available to them is not conveyed in a way that would be meaningful to them. That is where contextualization is needed to go with the task of translation.

#### **What is Contextualization?**

The word contextualization can have different meanings depending on the field of study in which it is used. Yet the different definitions of contextualization revolve around the particularity of the context in which a concept is placed or examined. In order to be as specific as possible, the focus of this section will be contextualization and its application in the area of Bible Translation where contextualization is found at a crossroad between

theology and missiology. Whiteman gives a simple, yet clear definition of contextualization:

Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Hesselgrave and Rommen add to that definition, saying that if the gospel is to be understood, contextualization must be true to the complete authority and unadulterated message of the Bible on the one hand, and it must be related to the cultural, linguistic, and religious background of the respondents on the other.<sup>2</sup>

### **Contextualization as a Means of Communication**

When authors write books, their intention would usually be that their book would be read and their audience would understand what they have written. Most of the time, they already have in mind a specific audience: they would know the context of their targeted audience even if it's different from theirs, and what they write would have a meaning to their receptors, especially if the shared cognitive environment of the writer and the receptors overlaps to a significant degree. If anyone outside that targeted audience reads that work, that person may not understand properly most of the things in the book because of his/her scope of understanding; then he/she even runs the risk of

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<sup>1</sup> D. L. Whiteman. "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 1 (1997): 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), ix.

misinterpreting and therefore misunderstanding the intended meaning of the author. One of the reasons why people often complain that a book or an article is difficult to read is that what they read is largely irrelevant to them. In such cases, context is not limited to a place but it also touches specific areas of peoples' cognitive environments such as cultures, knowledge, education, background and so on.

Along the same lines, communication would only fail if the context of the writer or speaker does not mean anything to the context of the reader or the audience. Needless to say, when communication fails, the audience either misses the author's or speaker's intended message completely, or they understand a small part of it and guess the meaning of the rest, or they pretend to understand and misinterpret the whole message.

Gutt sums it up by saying that “an act of communication is successful when the audience succeeds in inferring the informative intention of the communicator.”<sup>3</sup>

In order to have a successful communication, the speaker or the writer needs to know the context of his/her audience or they would need to adjust the way their message is delivered to fit into the context of the audience, without changing the core of the message.

That said, in Bible Translation, the goal is to remain faithful to the original text in its context, bearing in mind that translation work also involves the meeting place of two cultures. Arthur explained in her dissertation that all translations can be situated on a diagram between 'literal' or 'interlinear' and 'free translation' or 'paraphrase.' Towards the

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<sup>3</sup> Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1992), 14.

literal end, we have the 'formal equivalence translation' method: it seeks to preserve the original text as it is in terms of syntax and sentence structure as far as possible. A 'dynamic equivalence translation' method can be situated towards the other end, and aims at passing the message of the original source text to the receptor language in a way that is natural and meaningful to the latter.<sup>4</sup>

According to the previous definitions and Arthur's observation, contextualization then falls into the dynamic equivalence translation method. Therefore, contextualization is to keep the faithfulness of the original message although re-ordering or changes may occur in the translated text. But does faithfulness mean 'faithfulness to the text's syntax structure' or 'faithfulness to the intended meaning?'

Barnwell's explanation of a meaning-based or dynamic translation is that it is a translation that "aims to express the exact meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the new language."<sup>5</sup> Thus, translation is expected to produce the same understanding to its audience as the original audience. Yet, such an expectation is hard to attain if even attainable, so the translation process needs to be contextualized in order to produce a contextualized product that would satisfy the expectation and intention of the original writer. However this is easier said than done; such a production is not always easy because of the different contexts of the first receptors and the second ones. For instance the translation of "wineskin" in Mark 2:22, without any explanation of the

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<sup>4</sup> Sue Arthur, "The Word in West Africa: An investigation into the relationship between vernacular Scriptures and the contextualization of the gospel in West Africa," Master's dissertation (London School of Theology, 2012), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, 3rd ed. (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1986), 14.

context, it does not mean anything to the Malagasy people, not even to Malagasy wine producers. To them, wines are preserved in special barrels, and the barrels will not burst because of old wine. The idea of using leather to contain liquid would be a far-fetched idea to the Malagasy cognitive environment since leather (an animal's skin) is used for other purposes like bags, belts, and other household uses, and not for liquid. Furthermore, not only is wineskin an unknown concept to the Malagasy audience but it also comes from a culture that is foreign to them. There is no doubt that the 19<sup>th</sup> century Malagasy Bible translators did their very best when they translated wineskin as *siny hoditra* (leather bucket), but even so it still does not mean much to the Malagasy readers. The understanding of such notions to the original audience is then not the same as it is to the audience receiving the translation.

On the same note, since the present translators do not live in the context of the Bible writers, the best they can do is to explore and to study the background of the text that is given to them to translate: the historical-sociological-cultural background.<sup>6</sup> Once that is done, the possible ways to communicate the message in its entirety to the audience can be determined.

So, what can be done to help Malagasy Christians to cherish more and live out the precepts prescribed by the treasure they have had for so many years, the Bible, God's Word, through Bible translation?

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 96-98.



The aim of this thesis-project is to help Bible translators to pay more attention to details that may seem familiar to the reader, yet behind what looks simple, there is a major cultural issue that needs to be dealt with. The book of Ruth is full of cultural items that are sometimes difficult to understand nowadays. A simple reader may not notice these difficulties because the book is easy to read, but when one comes to translating it into another language, the problems become obvious.

There is no doubt as to the existence of so many concepts related to culture in the Bible that are beyond the Malagasy imagination. One of the significant cultural issues encountered in the book of Ruth is about marriage, especially the *לִבְיָדָא*, a Hebrew noun that was translated into “kinsman-redeemer”.

Although there might be many similarities in the Jewish and Malagasy cultures, when it comes to marriage, concepts of levirate marriage and kinsman redeemer are not easy to understand, especially with the complex meaning of the translation of *לִבְיָדָא* in Malagasy. It becomes a problem in the Church when the misunderstanding leads to misinterpretation and to wrong-doings among Christians. Such misunderstanding lies at the meeting of the two cultures, which shows that the similarities in the culture about marriage are somehow superficial.

The following will provide a short overview of the concept of marriage and levirate marriage both in Biblical Israel and in Malagasy culture in order to underline the differences and the assumed similarities in the two cultures.

## Marriage and Levirate Marriage in Biblical Israel

### Marriage

The Bible does not give the approximate age of the bride and the groom at the time of their marriage. Yet, Thompson indicates that by New Testament times, the minimum age for marriage was fixed by the rabbis: twelve years old for girls and thirteen years old for boys.<sup>7</sup> What is known for sure is that the bride was younger than the groom, childbearing began soon after puberty,<sup>8</sup> and the bride's virginity before the wedding was a very serious matter and was therefore highly valued.

In Biblical Israel, marriages were arranged by the parents although this was not required by the law, and though some exogamous marriages (marriages of people from different kinship groups) are found in the Bible, the rule to be observed was endogamy: the bride and the groom should come from the same clan or tribe.<sup>9</sup> In Deuteronomy 7: 3-4, endogamy was prescribed by God so as to prevent the Israelites from intermarrying with people from other nations. Yet, with such importance accorded to marriage, it was not considered a religious rite: it was rather the normal way of life. In Israel, celibacy had no status, and not to be married was considered a humiliation.<sup>10</sup> The boy or the girl may have had someone in mind that they wanted to marry but they had little choice but to depend on their parents' decision and had to ask the parents to arrange the marriage for

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<sup>7</sup> John A. Thompson, *Handbook of Life in Bible Times* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 54.

<sup>9</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 55.

<sup>10</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 56.

them. Moreover, the decisions of the father in a household were absolute and not to be disputed. He could give his children in marriage to whomever he chose.<sup>11</sup>

For a better understanding of what marriage was like in Biblical Israel, Rudd explains the different stages of marriage. He states that marriage had three stages: the betrothal or engagement, the consummation, and the celebration.<sup>12</sup> The next section will have a glance at these three stages of marriage in Biblical Israel, as explained by Rudd.

### **Stage 1: The Betrothal or Engagement**

The first stage of marriage was the contract between the bride's father and the groom: the betrothal or engagement. At this stage, the bride's father and the groom negotiated the dowry (*mohar*) and the bride price (*mahar*), which were two different things. The dowry, with some gifts added to it, was given to the bride's father to compensate for his loss of a daughter as the daughter assured the chores in the family. The dowry was presented during the engagement. On the other hand, the bride price was an agreed sum that the groom was to give to the bride's father at the time in case the groom wanted to divorce his wife or if he wanted to get a second wife. Exodus 22:16-17 stipulates clearly that “if a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. If her father

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<sup>11</sup> Wycliffe Bible Translators, *Daily Life in Bible Times*, 1st ed. (Dallas, TX: Wycliffe Bible Translators, Inc.), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Rudd, *The Three Stage Ritual of Bible Marriages*, accessed February 02, 2014, [www.bible.ca/marriage/ancient-jewish-three-stage-weddings-and-marriage-customs-ceremony-in-the-bible.htm](http://www.bible.ca/marriage/ancient-jewish-three-stage-weddings-and-marriage-customs-ceremony-in-the-bible.htm).

absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins.” The bride price was usually set at 50 shekels of silver.

When the groom and the bride's father came to an agreement, they signed the legal document, called *ketubbah* or “marriage contract”. It was a proof that the two were now legally married. The *ketubbah* was kept in the bride's possession until stage 2, the consummation, which we will see in the next section. Betrothal or engagement was fully the equivalent of our understanding of marriage today, and only a legal divorce could dissolve it. Yet, the bride and the groom were still not to live together and so far could still not engage in any sexual relations. It may take several months, up to seven years, between the signing of the *ketubbah* and stage 2. During this waiting period, the groom was to prepare a new home for the bride, usually at his father's house, and the bride was expected to remain faithful to her groom as she was preparing herself to the time when he would come back and take her to their new home.<sup>13</sup>

## **Stage 2: The Consummation**

The second stage of marriage consisted of *chuppah* or “sexual consummation.” It was the very first time the couple engaged in sexual relations, which shows to today’s audience the high value that this society had over the woman's virginity. Once the groom met all of the conditions of the marriage contract and was ready to take his bride home, he chose the date for the *chuppah* and sent a notice to the bride and her family about it.

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Rudd, *The Three Stage Ritual of Bible Marriages*.

For this *chuppah* special event, a room would be prepared for them at the bride's home and the bride would be escorted by her parents. Several people were formally assigned by the parents along with some friends of the couple as witnesses. These witnesses would wait outside the room during the actual *chuppah*, the sexual relations. Before the act itself, the bride would be given a piece of cloth called “proof of virginity” that she would put under her during their intercourse: the blood that would be shed on it during the intercourse would be the proof of her virginity. Afterwards, the groom, not the bride, would hand that cloth to the witnesses outside the room, and the father of the bride would keep it as a proof of her virginity.<sup>14</sup>

### **Stage 3: The Celebration**

At this stage, the betrothal period would now be long gone, and the *chuppah* had already taken place; only then would there be a celebration: this was the last stage of the process, the third stage. The wedding feast came immediately after the sexual consummation. The party was held in the home of the groom and it started with the declaration of the groom that the marriage was consummated. It is to be noted that depending on the wealth of the family, the celebration may last for several days and was usually a big feast.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Steve Rudd, *The Three Stage Ritual of Bible Marriages*.

<sup>15</sup> Steve Rudd, *The Three Stage Ritual of Bible Marriages*.

## Levirate Marriage

Levirate marriage was an obligation of a man to marry his widow sister in-law whose deceased husband had died either without children or without a son. It showed the importance of procreation and the preservation of patrimony in the family. The son who would be borne by the brother and the sister in-law would be considered as the deceased man's son so that the deceased man's name and family line will continue. As King & Stager indicate: "If a married man died without children, his brother was to cohabit with the widow for several reasons: to prevent the widow from marrying an outsider (exogamy), to perpetuate the name of the deceased, and to preserve within the family the inherited land of the deceased."<sup>16</sup>

In Deuteronomy 25:5-10, the Law that Moses wrote on levirate was:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.

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<sup>16</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 56.

## **Marriage and Levirate Marriage in the Malagasy Culture**

### **Marriage**

The island of Madagascar is composed of 18 ethnic groups and each ethnic group has its customs when it comes to marriage; yet, there are some common traits that are common to all groups. Very little has been written about Madagascar and marriage so this section will attempt to give a neutral perspective on this topic as much as possible in describing these common traits.

It is worth noticing from the beginning that in the Malagasy culture, marriage involves the entire family, not the man and woman only. Families always have strong bonds and the consent of the parents from both sides is essential to the achievement of the marriage.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the love of the two people who want to marry is not sufficient to lead to marriage.

Two Malagasy people who would be married would normally come from the same caste and family background, and there were cases where, to some extent, they were relatives of some sort. Sometimes, the parents from both sides arranged the marriage for their young children. The children grew up knowing that they were already engaged and sooner or later, they would be married. However, with time and especially given the cultural changes that have occurred in the last half century in Madagascar, such

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<sup>17</sup> Nelly Rakotobe et al., *L'Union Conjugale en Imerina*, 14, accessed August 19, 2016, [http://madarevues.recherches.gov.mg/IMG/pdf/cahier-coutume9\\_1\\_.pdf](http://madarevues.recherches.gov.mg/IMG/pdf/cahier-coutume9_1_.pdf).

customs and practices became less and less bearable and less acceptable to the younger generation: it is no longer a high-valued practice.<sup>18</sup>

According to the culture, there are four ways that lead to marriage: *fofombady* (lit. smell of the spouse), *vady amboarina* (lit. arranged spouse), *loloha* (levirate), and the love of the two people. The following is how Cousins explains it.

### *Fofombady*

The concept of *fofombady* is practiced mostly in families who value endogamy. In other words, *fofombady* happens mainly between relatives. While the boy and the girl are still very young, the parents from both sides agree that their children will be married when they come to the age of marriage. The parents persuade their children in their childhood, to accept the arrangement, and since such arrangement is made known in the community, no one would dare to go against it once it is set. *Fofombady* is not tied to either any engagement or any obligation and does not necessarily end up in marriage. Unfortunately, the arrangement does not usually work and the two young people never get married because they have access to the outside world, are more open-minded than the parents, and want to choose for themselves. Such a decision often leads to a rupture between the two families as well. That is why people sometimes say that the young people are tired of the smell and don't want to eat the real food anymore.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Régis Rajemisa-Raolison, *Fomba amam-pahendrena Malagasy: Ny Fanambadiana teo amin'ny Ntaolo Malagasy*, accessed August 19, 2016, [www.echoscapricorne.perso.neuf.fr/malagasy/fanambady.htm](http://www.echoscapricorne.perso.neuf.fr/malagasy/fanambady.htm).

<sup>19</sup> W. E. Cousins, *Fomba Malagasy*, ed. Randzavola (Antananarivo: Trano Printy Imarivolonitra, 1963), 29-30.



### *Vady Amboarina*

This one is quite like *fofombady* but the marriage is arranged when the two people to get married are at the age of marrying. The parents would talk to their children to ask for their opinion but it is obvious that the parents want to arrange the marriage because they think that they made the right choice for their children, or for their own benefit like family honor, wealth and so on. The two young people may accept the parents' arrangement so as not to upset them but usually such marriage does not last because the two don't have love for one another. But there are instances where the marriage works after struggling a lot. The main issue that the arranged marriage brings up is confusion between the two people who marry in order to satisfy the desire of the parents. They cannot really define if their marriage is out of consent, or out of respect and obedience to the parents.<sup>20</sup>

### *Vady Loloha or Levirate Marriage*

*Vady loloha* is applied if the man dies while still young and he has a brother or a cousin who is still single and at the age of marrying. Levirate marriage is not automatic. At the time of the marriage, the families from both sides make an agreement on what to do if the man dies early. The woman's family can decide that their daughter would not be

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<sup>20</sup> W. E. Cousins, *Fomba Malagasy*, 30.

the wife of many men (*vadin'ny maro lahy*), and therefore, the levirate would not apply to her.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Love of the Two People*

In more recent years, the bride and the groom would be more or less the same age. Usually, they would have known each other for a number of months or years before they decided to date. As their relationship develops into becoming more and more serious and reaches a stage where they are ready to take the first serious step towards the marriage direction, they inform their respective parents.<sup>22</sup>

### The Stages of Marriage<sup>23</sup>

#### **Stage 1: *Fiantranoana* (lit. visit)**

When two people engage into a serious relationship and agree to move on into marriage and the parents are aware of their decision, the first step to take is for the groom's parents and his siblings to visit and introduce themselves to the bride's nuclear family, even if the parents already know each other in some cases. This particular event is called *fiantranoana* or *fisehoana* (lit. appearance). It is a sign of mutual respect between the two families.

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<sup>21</sup> W. E. Cousins, *Fomba Malagasy*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> W. E. Cousins, *Fomba Malagasy*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Ny fomba amam-panao teo amin'ny fanambadiana malagasy*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://lecitoyen.mg/?p=1408>.

There is still no promise of marriage: although the couple-to-be might openly state that it is their intention to get married, at this stage it is only an intention.

The main idea behind this particular rite is that the parents would want to know each other as well as the siblings on both sides. Later on, if the two have confirmed their decision to get married, they then talk to their parents, usually about the dates for the different steps to take place.

### **Stage 2: *Fangatahana* (lit. asking)**

The next stage after the *fisehoana* is called *fangatahana*. The groom's family comes to the bride's family to officially ask for her hand. If the latter accepts, then they proceed to the next step which is about organizing the next event: the *vodiondry* or the engagement ceremony.

It is necessary to note here that it is the groom's family who asks for the bride's hand and that it is the bride's family, in the person of her father (not the bride), who gets to decide: most of this exchange is usually done through two spokespersons, one representing the groom and the other the bride. Even if the parents from both sides already know each other and even if it is an arranged marriage, this step is still more than required.

Most of the time, the bride's family gives their daughter's hand to the young man but there are also cases when the parents refuse the union and don't accept in the end. In such cases, everything stops at this stage.

### Stage 3: *Vodiondry* (lit. sheep's rump)

On a different agreed upon day after the *fangatahana*, the two families once again get together at the bride's house: this is now the long awaited moment called *vodiondry*. It is the time when the groom and his family pays the dowry. In other words, this is the engagement time.

Many decades ago, people would give a whole sheep (alive) or a big portion of its meat, usually the sheep's rump.<sup>24</sup> These days, it is symbolically substituted with money, put in an envelope, and given to the bride's parents: the amount would be decided by the groom's family, as it is expected that during the actual engagement ceremony, the bride's family would usually negotiate to receive a higher amount, regardless of the initial amount already in there. In many families, the unwritten rule is that each existing piece of money in the country (coins and notes) should be represented in the envelope, on top of the dowry. Some parents might open the envelope in the presence of everyone and they bargain if they would find that the dowry is not enough according to them, but nowadays, the two families can also agree that whatever is in the envelope would be accepted without opening it.<sup>25</sup>

The dowry is given to the bride's parents as a symbol of paying them compensation for the absence of their daughter who was a great help and who did the chores in her family. During the ceremony, the groom may offer a gift to the bride's

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<sup>24</sup> The rump is believed to be the best part of the meat, no matter what animal it is, ranging from chicken to cows. As a sign of respect to parents, the best part is given to them. The cow's rump is for the king, the chicken's for the oldest in the family, and the sheep's for the parents in-law, accessed September 25, 2014, [www.mamafisoa.mg/fomba\\_art.php?page=4](http://www.mamafisoa.mg/fomba_art.php?page=4).

<sup>25</sup> W. E. Cousins, *Fomba Malagasy*, 47.

brother(s), called *tampi-maso* (lit. eyewear). Talking about the marriage of a girl in front of her brother(s) is considered a taboo, so such gift is to remove the taboo.<sup>26</sup> On their side, the bride's family offers a party during which the bride receives an engagement ring from her fiancé.

Traditionally, after this stage, the couple are understood and already declared husband and wife, and the bride would already be expected to go home with the groom and his family. Her parents will have some gifts sent with her as a sign of their love to this newly married couple, mainly to help them start up their household.<sup>27</sup> Usually, on that same day or a few days later, another welcome party is held for her by the groom's family.

There is no mention of the marriage consummation in the culture. In some parts of the country, trial marriages are still practiced. The couple would live together for a year and they would only proceed to marriage if the woman gets pregnant during that given time.<sup>28</sup> It is an honour for the groom to marry his bride when the latter is already pregnant because it shows that the family line will continue. In Christian families, it is a shame for both families when the bride is pregnant before marriage, yet it is accepted as the showing of the groom's seriousness and acceptance of his responsibility towards his bride and his child.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ny fomba amam-panao teo amin'ny fanambadiana malagasy*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://lecityen.mg/?p=1408>.

<sup>27</sup> These gifts would always be household items such as bed, mattress, kitchen items, and mats. eArticle, accessed September 25, 2014, [www.mariage.mg/tradition-et-mariage-a-madagascar](http://www.mariage.mg/tradition-et-mariage-a-madagascar).

<sup>28</sup> Conrad P. Kottak, *Betsileo*, (1996), 8, accessed September 03, 2016, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3458001473.html>.

Although modernity has also entered the culture, some ethnic groups still practice the tradition just described above and the concept of *vodiondry* is practiced all over the country.

Nowadays, the law requires the registration of every marriage, or the civil marriage, usually at the mayor's office. The law also requires that both people have to be at least 18 years old, although in the past, once the child reached the age of puberty, he/she could get married. Therefore if young people want to get married before the age of 18, for one reason or another, the parents need to get a special authorization from the court to marry their child/children.<sup>29</sup> It is only after the civil ceremony that they can proceed to the religious ceremony. This latter is not required but practiced by many people, even non church goers, because the culture somehow got Christianized. Some people may not want to choose a church ceremony since before the law, they are already married. And the big party, inviting a couple hundreds of family and friends from both sides, is given after the civil ceremony for those who do not go to church, or after the religious ceremony if there is one.<sup>30</sup>

### *Loloha or Levirate*

Rajemisa-Raolison gives a few definitions of levirate in the Malagasy context.

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<sup>29</sup> Etat Malagasy, “LOI N° 2007-022 du 20 août 2007 relative au mariage et aux régimes matrimoniaux,” *Journal Officiel* no. 3 163 (January 28, 2008): 131, accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.droit-afrique.com/upload/doc/madagascar/Madagascar-Loi-2007-22-mariage-et-regimes-matrimoniaux.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> “Vodiondry,” accessed February 1, 2014, [www.mariage.mg/le-vodi-ondry-fiancailles-malgaches/](http://www.mariage.mg/le-vodi-ondry-fiancailles-malgaches/).

- As a verb, it is to support and to take care of close family members who are struggling financially;
- As a noun, it can be ‘close family members that are under one's obligation to support and to take care of’ OR
- ‘A widow that is remarried to the brother of her deceased husband.’<sup>31</sup>

The last definition is the one that is mostly understood and most common to people. It is also applied to a widower who is remarried to the sister of his deceased wife and is still practiced in village life in many parts of the country.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis-project is to give the importance of contextualization and communication in Bible translation by taking the concept of marriage in the book of Ruth as a case study, and the translation of *laxa* in the Malagasy Bible as an example of a need for a meaningful and contextualized translation. *laxa* is not simply a word, it is a concept in itself. Its translation is therefore tied to the concept that it is. And *laxa* as a concept is based on a deep culture that is related to marriage and family ties that can be part of the levirate marriage or can stand alone as well. Therefore, a better translation of the concept is important in order to give a meaning to that concept in a given context, here in Malagasy.

In the next chapter of this thesis-project, the focus will be on the marriage as an institution that God established and the importance that He gave to *laxa* in the community

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<sup>31</sup> Régis Rajemisa-Raolison, “Loloha,” in *Rakibolana Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa: Ambozontany, 1995), 546.

of Israel. That will include a look at what the Bible says about the part that culture is playing in the reading of Scripture and the understanding of who people are in light of God's Word. Other examples from the Bible will be given here in order to reinforce the value that God has for different cultures.

Chapter 3 will focus on how different writers and scholars address the issue of contextual communication and contextual translation. It will begin with a short study on dynamic/functional equivalence in translation, as de Waard and Nida offers in *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (1960). Then a glimpse on Hill's style of communication in her *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads* (2006) when she talks about “interrelatedness of text and context in translation” (xiii) will follow. Her work is more focused on Relevance Theory. From a more general point of view, Nord will be taken into consideration in her *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (1997). Her theory is focused more on “the function or functions of texts and translations” (1) and Pym in his *Exploring Translation Theories* (2010), as he states clearly in his preface that “anyone who wants to know about translation theory must read the theorists, in context and in all their complexity.”

In order to address the issue of the translation of *ḥay* in Malagasy and to bring a contribution into the field of Bible translation in Malagasy, a survey in Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar was conducted. Based on the author's knowledge of the cultural setting, and having the literature review, a qualitative data collection in a form of a questionnaire of seven questions was developed and distributed to 600 people and a feedback from 453 of them was received. The questionnaire is in the Appendix. This part



mainly assesses the actual translation of גָּאֵל, how the concept is understood in the Malagasy context through its translation. A description of the way the research was conducted, a compilation of the results, and an evaluation of the results form the fourth chapter of this thesis-project.

The last chapter of this thesis-project will concentrate on the outcome of the research. It is evident from the results of the questionnaire that a more culturally appropriate and better translation is needed to better understand the concept of גָּאֵל. גָּאֵל is just one example among hundreds that are culturally based that any Bible translation consultant is facing in the field. By bringing a solution to this issue, the author's hope is to open ways for others to pay more attention to details that may look simple and yet hide a big stumbling block to understanding the concept of a key-word, here is the concept of “redemption.”

In this thesis-project, the use of the third person masculine pronoun denotes interchangeably the masculine and feminine gender and is therefore gender neutral unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

Unless mentioned, the Bible versions used in this thesis-project are *New International Version* (1984) for English, *La Bible en Français Courant* (1997) for French, *Ny Baiboly* (2011) for the Malagasy Protestant version, and *Ny Baiboly Katolika* (Android version 2012) for the Malagasy Catholic version.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF CULTURE, MARRIAGE, AND גאול

#### Theological Framework of Culture

The word “culture” is not new to the ears and people have their own interpretation or definition of what culture is according to their background and the focus of what is being talked about. In this section, the focus is more on culture as customs and beliefs and God's place in it.

#### Definitions of Culture

Culture is a complex concept and has various definitions and interpretations. The term itself is used in different ways depending on the context.

The Meriam-Webster dictionary gives us six definitions of the word “culture.”

The fifth definition which is divided in four sections is what interests us the most. Culture is:

**a** - the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations

**b** - the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time: popular culture, Southern culture

**c** - the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization: a corporate culture focused on the bottom line

**d** - the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic: studying the effect of computers on print culture.<sup>1</sup>

The first definition from the Cambridge Dictionary states that culture is “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.”<sup>2</sup>

Newell in his *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* defines culture as “the distinctive beliefs, values, and customs of a particular group of people that determine how they think, feel, and behave.”<sup>3</sup>

And Newman and Newman state that “culture is largely hidden from and invisible to the people within the system. It is like air, we do not notice it until it is gone. It is shared by all or almost all members, and is passed on from one generation to the next. It shapes our behavior and structures our perception of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

From these definitions above, people’s behaviors and their way of life influence how they function, live together as a group, and form their culture.

Hill states the view that,

Cultures are dynamic and change in response to circumstances and outside influences. It is not possible to study a 'pure' culture: it doesn't exist. Nor is

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary, “Culture,” eDictionary, accessed on May 29, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, “Culture,” eDictionary, accessed on May 29, 2017, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>.

<sup>3</sup> Newell, Marvin J., *Crossing Culture in Scripture: Biblical Principles for Mission Practice*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 212-213, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> Willis Newman and Esmeralda Newman, *Bible Teaching About Culture* (Newman International, 2007), accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.bible-teaching-about.com/culture.html>.

it possible to study 'the biblical culture'. There wasn't just one; there were many and each changed over time. When researching present-day cultures, both the traditional and modern must be understood.<sup>5</sup>

There are norms that are set in a culture. The norms are the part of people's daily life that they accept and respect consciously or unconsciously. Each family has their own norm, and so does a community and a nation. Clement and al. suggest that “the norm of a culture is their way of life and behaviours as dictated by the set of rules and regulations of that society. It is the sum total of all the expectations, values, and aspirations of any given society.”<sup>6</sup>

### Marriage and Culture

The Bible does not give any specific definition of culture. Yet, culture is universal and the Bible helps its reader to understand what culture is and where it originates from.

Culture influences marriage and people tend to confuse the elements of culture reflected in marriage to be an integral part of God's intention for marriage. Marriage itself is a culture that God established for human beings, male and female, and how marriage is reached depends on the elements of the culture which differ from one society to another or what we call customs. Each society is free to adopt the way that works for them according to their customs to make marriage legal in their eyes.

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<sup>5</sup> Harriet S. Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication*. (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006), 98.

<sup>6</sup> Atchenemou H. Clement et al., *Cross-Cultural Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Jos: Nigeria Evangelical Missionary Institute, 1996), 63.

In the Jewish customs, marriage was governed by marriage contract or *ketubbah*. Marriage contracts change with time and space.

A case of a marriage contract was the arranged marriage, like what we see in Genesis 24:50-60 when Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for his son Isaac. The arrangement was between Bethuel the father of Rebekah, Laban the brother of Rebekah, and the unnamed Abraham's servant. After the negotiations between the three men regarding Rebekah to become the wife of Isaac, Abraham's servant paid the bride price before he and the people with him feasted. There is no mention about Rebekah participating in the negotiations at all but it is only after all of the arrangements that she was asked if she would go or not. Although Isaac and Rebekah had not seen one another before, Rebekah did not hesitate to follow the man. On his side, Isaac loved Rebekah and was comforted after his mother's death (v. 66).

Another case of a marriage contract is the labor contract like what happened in the story of Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel, in Genesis 29:16-30. The contract was that Jacob had to work for his uncle, Laban, seven years times two in order to get the two daughters to be his wives. Although he loved Rachel more, she was younger than Leah and the culture did not allow her to be married before her older sister.<sup>7</sup> Despite his love, Jacob had no other choice than to marry the older sister first before marrying the younger one.

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<sup>7</sup> “Laban replied, ‘It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven year of work.’” (Genesis 29:26-27)

The story of Joseph and Mary in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 is a more complicated example. It happened during the time when the Romans were ruling the world, so Joseph and Mary were bound to both the Roman law and the Jewish one (Luke 2:1-5, 21-24, 39). At the time of this story, as per the Jewish customs, Joseph and Mary were legally and traditionally married: Mary was betrothed to Joseph. In their context, the betrothal period often lasted about a year and the couple could not be together alone before the wedding.<sup>8</sup> They did not live together and had no sexual relations. Yet, Mary was found to be pregnant.

Joseph was mentioned to be a righteous man, which means he is zealous in observing the law. He wanted to save Mary from public disgrace, so he decided to divorce her secretly. From Joseph's logical reason, Mary was unfaithful to him and slept with another man, that is why she got pregnant. He knew that by divorcing Mary publicly, he would gain the cause, but he chose to do it in secret. And God prevented him from divorcing his wife.<sup>9</sup>

Since Joseph and Mary were not living together even though they were legally married, the Lord sent an angel to assure Joseph that what was happening is from the Lord and he should not hesitate to take Mary home with him now and to end the betrothal period. Joseph's righteousness was proved one more time after the angel's visit in his dream. He obeyed the angel of the Lord. He took his wife home without considering what

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<sup>8</sup> “Comment on Matthew 1:18” in *NIV Cultural Background Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 1609.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 1:19-25

the neighbors might say about him or his wife. And though Mary was home with him, he did not have any sexual relations with her until the baby was born (Matthew 1:25).

One thing we learn through these examples is that elements of culture may distort God's intention for marriage but God's purpose regarding marriage remain the same.

## **Theological Framework of Marriage**

### **Definitions**

A simple definition of marriage is hard to find these days as people have different opinions regarding marriage. Most people may say that a marriage is a big celebration of the union and love of a man and a woman who want to spend the rest of their lives with one another. *Le Larousse* dictionary gives the following definition on marriage: “*Acte solennel par lequel un homme et une femme (ou, dans certains pays, deux personnes de même sexe) établissent entre eux une union dont les conditions, les effets et la dissolution sont régis par le Code civil (mariage civil) ou par les lois religieuses (mariage religieux)*,”<sup>10</sup> which the author translated literally as “A solemn act by which a man and a woman (or in some countries, two people of the same sex) establish a union and the conditions, effects and dissolution of such union are governed by the Civil Code (civil marriage) or the religious laws (religious marriage).”

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<sup>10</sup> *Dictionnaire de français Larousse*, “mariage,” eDictionary, accessed on February 15, 2016, <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/mariage/49471#Ma5OF5kSVMb8rozu.99>.

Dare quoted three definitions of how marriage is understood nowadays based on ethics, sociology, and theology:<sup>11</sup>

- Marriage regulates relations between the sexes in all known forms of society and governs the status and education of children within the community (Waddams 1967 p.206).<sup>12</sup>
- A legally and socially sanctioned union between one or more husbands and one or more wives that accords status to their offspring and is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners (Barnard 2000).<sup>13</sup>
- That lifelong and exclusive state in which a man and a woman are wholly committed to live with each other in sexual relationship under conditions normally approved and witnessed by their social group or society (Bower and Knapp 1986 vol.3 p.261).<sup>14</sup>

According to Alexander, marriage is

an intimate and complementing union between a man and a woman in which the two become one physically, in the whole of life. The purpose of marriage is to reflect the relationship of the Godhead and to serve him. Although the fall has marred the divine purpose and function of marriage, this definition reflects the God-ordained ideal for marriage from the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

The *Anglican Common Book of Prayer* in the celebration and blessing of marriage section states that,

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<sup>11</sup> Kevin Dare, *Theology of Marriage*, (September 2002), accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.beeston-baptists.org.uk/docstore/74.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> H. Waddams, "Marriage," *A Dictionary Of Christian Ethics*, (1967), quoted in Kevin Dare, *Theology of Marriage*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> A. J. Barnard, "Marriage Stage," *Britannica CD 2000*, (2000), quoted in Kevin Dare, *Theology of Marriage*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> R. K. Bower and G. L. Knapp, "Marriage," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, (1986): 261, quoted in Kevin Dare, *Theology of Marriage*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ralph H. Alexander, "Marriage" in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/marriage.html>.



The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Whereas Köstenberger expressed his view that,

The Judeo-Christian view of marriage and the family with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures has to a significant extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual or societal level. It can rightly be said that marriage and the family are institutions under siege in our world today, and that with marriage and the family, our very civilization is in crisis.<sup>16</sup>

Although there are many definitions about marriage and people may have different opinions on marriage, what's common in both Christian and non-Christian circles is that there is an intimate relationship and union between the married couple. The influence of culture in the given community makes such union as a norm and acceptable. The community is therefore involved in the marriage of two people in one way or another.

In the following section, the focus will be on what the Bible teaches about marriage as an institution that God established.

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<sup>16</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Biblical Framework for Marriage," *Midwestern Journal of Theology*, 4.2 (Spring 2006): 24, accessed May 29, 2017, <http://cdm16478.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16478coll3/id/38>.

## Creation

When talking about the Creator and His creation, Thomas points out clearly that

The picture of God as Creator is central to his authority, identity, and purpose. In fact, the Bible is framed around the fact that God is Creator. The first thing we learn about God in the book of Genesis is that He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1); the last image of the New Testament shows God creating a new heaven and a new earth. When God says, 'I am making everything new!' (Revelation 21:5), the word *making* is in the present tense. It's an ongoing process. God walks into eternity creating.<sup>17</sup>

The peak of the story of creation described in Genesis 1 was God's creation of man and woman. During the first five days, God created the earth and everything in it, except the human beings. Everything He created was in order to prepare for the welcoming of Adam and Eve. He ONLY spoke, and they happened. *Africa Bible Commentary* gives us clear divisions of creation in Genesis 1:

The first thing God created out of the raw material of the universe was light (1:3-5). It was created before everything else because it would be essential for the survival of future plants, animal and human beings... During the second phase of his creation, covering days two to four (1:6-19), God provided the material framework to sustain living beings... The way the Creator brought together all that was necessary for our survival before creating us reminds us that God was working for our good, not creating us so that we might suffer (Lam. 3:33; Ezek. 33:11)... On day five, God created the creatures that live in sea and sky (1:20-23), followed on the sixth day by animals that live on land (1:24-25), and finally the culmination of his creation, human beings.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, "Genesis", in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Adeyemo Tokunboh (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 11.

It was only when everything was ready that God created Adam, and He created him differently. “So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27) This is explained further in Genesis 2:7 which says that “God formed a man out of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils, and he became a living being.”

God was pleased with His work and saw that everything was good, but when He finished his creation on the sixth day, He saw that all He had made was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Guest gives a beautiful summary of the story of the creation of human beings: “The creation of man and woman in God’s image makes us the crowning glory of his creation. Nothing else was created in His image. While we see the glory of God in his creation (Romans 1:20) human beings were created bearing the actual image of God.”<sup>19</sup>

### Marriage Institution

Two verbs that are found in Genesis 2:7 are “to form” and “to breathe into”: “the Lord God *formed* the man from the dust of the ground and *breathed into* his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being”. These two verbs show the presence of God's touch in the creation of the human being, God's special intimacy to man. Because of that intimacy, God knows man's needs: the Creator knows the needs of his creation. Adam lived in a perfect relationship with God and with nature and the text does not

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<sup>19</sup> John Guest, *God's Design for Marriage and Family*, accessed May 29, 2017, <http://flfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/c.-Gods-Design-for-Marriage-and-Family.pdf>

record him asking for any companion, yet God was concerned about the fact that he was alone. Six times in Genesis chapter one we read that “God saw that it (what was just created) was good.” The same chapter concludes with a strong statement about all His creation in verse 31, “God saw all He had made, and it was very good.”

Despite the perfect state of God's creation, He saw one thing that was “not good” and mentioned it in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” For that reason, He created the woman from the rib that He took from the man because He did not find a suitable helper for Adam from any of the other living creatures (Genesis 2:19-22). The woman was made from the man, meaning that there is an interconnection between them, an intimate link that is not found in other creatures. “The Bible helps people to realize that they live in a universe where ultimate reality is relational. For this man to be alone in a world created and ruled by the God who is love—the very fact that it *is* a perfect world makes his aloneness unthinkable.”<sup>20</sup>

In verse 23 of Genesis 2, Adam himself recognized the deep intimacy that was created and established between him and his wife: “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”. *African Bible Commentary* points out that “if God had simply created two individuals without any bond between them, they might have found it difficult to establish a relationship and life would have been painful.”<sup>21</sup>

Such a deep intimacy and yet total openness is summed up in verse 25 of the same chapter that “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, eds. Dane C. Ortlund and Miles Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 22.

<sup>21</sup> Barnabe Assohoto and Samuel Ngewa, “Genesis”, 13.

After the man and the woman were formed, the writer of Genesis summed up the story of creation with the first reference to marriage in Genesis 2:24, “For that reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Jesus quoted the same statement twice in the New Testament in Matthew 19:5 and in Mark 10:7 when he was asked about divorce, and Paul quoted it once in Ephesians 5:31, when relating marriage to Jesus.

God was the One who instituted marriage and marriage is God's plan to remove man's aloneness. He created people with the needs to have an intimate human relationship and He provided what people need. “Man is a social creature, made for relationship, and the creation of woman is – it is said – God's primary provision for his social need.”<sup>22</sup>

Such relationship reflects God's nature and when we understand the depth and width of the relationship in a marriage, it would be easier for us to understand God's nature. As Dare wrote,

Fundamental to the Christian understanding of God's nature is the concept of relationship, expressed not only in the Trinity but also in the knowability of God and the possibility of human-divine communion. This communion, reflected in all human relationships, particularly in marriage, is used by Scripture in a unique way to illustrate something of the nature of God.<sup>23</sup>

Marriage shows God's complete nature as in marriage, man and woman are to complete one another, to be wholly committed to each other, and to live with each other.

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<sup>22</sup> Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the service of God* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 107.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Dare, *Theology of Marriage*, 12.

## Impacts of the Fall on Marriage

God established marriage to be perfect, in the same way as he created Adam and Eve perfect. The life of the couple started in the perfect garden of Eden. Nothing hindered their intimacy and openness to one another.

### **Perfect into Imperfect**

The fall happened when Adam and Eve sinned. The perfect state of their marriage broke down. God made clear to them the consequences of their actions in their marriage and their life. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* gives a simple description of the fall and its impact on Adam and Eve:

The fruit of the tree is pleasant to look upon; it is good to eat; it is to be desired to make one wise; moreover, the tempter moves upon the woman by the method of the half truth. God had said that disobedience to the command would bring death; the tempter urged that disobedience would not bring death, implying that the command of God had meant that death would immediately follow the eating of the forbidden fruit. In the story the various avenues of approach of sin to the human heart are graphically suggested, but after the seductiveness of evil has thus been set forth, the fact remains that both transgressors knew they were transgressing.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore they had to leave the perfect place in the garden, the woman would have pain during childbearing and when giving birth, they had to do painful toil in order to eat, and they would even know physical death (Genesis 3).

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<sup>24</sup> Francis J. McConnell, "Sin (1)" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), accessed May 29, 2017, [http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/S/sin-\(1\).html](http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/S/sin-(1).html)

Despite all of that, God is still showing people that He cares for the marriage that He established. He provided and made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).

Mankind's sin did not make God invalidate the importance of marriage. Instead, God allowed rules, laws, and regulations to protect marriage, as rather in Deuteronomy 22 and 24, Matthew 10 and in other passages.

## **Divorce**

One impact of the fall on marriage is also divorce. It is sad to realize that “no relationship comes with a lifetime guarantee. Even men and women who grew up in stable homes, who attend church and consider themselves Christians, who promise 'until death do us part,' can have it all fall apart.”<sup>25</sup>

In Deuteronomy 24:1, a divorce is allowed at any time when the man finds something indecent about his wife, and in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9, Jesus made it clear that only marital unfaithfulness can lead a man into a divorce.

There is no contradiction in these points on divorce. Jesus sums it all up in Matthew 19:8 that divorce was allowed because people's hearts were hard. This points to the fact that God designed marriage to be a lifetime commitment and people's sins destroyed His design.

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<sup>25</sup> Carol Heffernan, *God's Design for Marriage*, (2002), accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.focusonthe-family.com/marriage/gods-design-for-marriage/marriage-gods-idea/gods-design-for-marriage>.

## God's Purpose in Marriage

“The biblical model for marriage is that of loving complementarity, where the husband and the wife are partners who value and respect each other and where the husband’s loving leadership is met with the wife’s intelligent response.”<sup>26</sup> *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* continues its explanation of marriage saying that,

The New Testament marriage imagery describes the relationship between Christ and his church (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; Rev 19:7-9). The church, Christ's bride, is sacrificially loved by Christ, just as a husband should love his wife (Ephesians 5:25, 28-30, 33). The husband's responsibility is leadership, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body (Eph 5:23). The wife responds submissively to her husband's sacrificial love like the church submits to Christ's (Ephesians 5:22, 24, 33). The husband's love assists her in becoming holy and blameless before God, even as Christ presents the church without blemish to the Father (Eph 5:26-28). Christ's relationship with the church becomes the functional model for a marriage relationship.<sup>27</sup>

Paul is drawing our attention to marriage in 1 Corinthians 11:3 when he says that “I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

Thomas skillfully summarizes it all in his book *Sacred Marriage* that “God didn’t design marriage to compete with himself but to point us to himself,”<sup>28</sup> and “God did not create marriage just to give us a pleasant means of repopulating the world and providing

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<sup>26</sup> Köstenberger, *The Biblical Framework for Marriage*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, “Marriage” in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 27.



a steady societal institution for the benefit of humanity; he planted marriage among humans as another signpost pointing to his own eternal, spiritual existence.”<sup>29</sup>

### Widowhood and Remarriage

In biblical times, widows and orphans were marginalized in society and they were generally poor. The Bible does not talk much about widowhood and remarriage, yet in many instances, we find in the Bible that widows and orphans are special in God's eyes and He gives special attention to them.

### God's Care for Widows and Orphans

In the context of Ancient Israel, the death of the husband entailed a social and economic change in the widow's life. The culture rejected widows and marginalized them so that they became poor and mostly lived in extreme poverty, especially if they wouldn't have any family member to take care of them.

*Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* confirms that,

Her crisis was aggravated if she had no able-bodied children to help her work the land of her dead spouse. To provide for her children, to maintain the estate, and to continue payments on debts accrued by her husband imposed severe burdens. Since she was in an extremely vulnerable economic position, she became the prime target of exploitation. The fact that she was classed with the landless stranger and Levite indicates that she was often unable to keep her husband's land.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, “Widow” in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/widow.html>.

The Bible shows in different occasions how important it is in God's sight to take care of widows and orphans, the poor, and strangers.

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul exhorted the church to take care of widows although he classified them in two categories: the younger ones who were not really considered as widows because they have a high chance of getting married again and Paul encouraged them to do so, and those who were over sixty and who were faithful to their husbands, righteous and had a godly life in their community, and had no family support.

Nonetheless if the man dies before the woman, God promises to take care of the widow and the orphans. The explanation from the *Africa Bible Commentary* helps its readers to understand that “the Hebrew word for 'widow' derives from a root word meaning 'unable to speak' and reveals the legal status of the widow in the ancient world: she had no one to speak for her.”<sup>31</sup>

The first clear commands that God gave regarding widows and orphans are in Exodus 22:22-23 when God gave the law on social responsibility, “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry.”

In Deuteronomy 10:18-19, Moses talks about God's compassion and mercy towards widows, orphans, and foreigners: “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” This care that God is providing is reinforced in Deuteronomy 27:19: “Cursed is the man who

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<sup>31</sup> Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, “Widows And Orphans,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 817.

withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.” God even included in the Law the care for widows and the fatherless as we read in Deuteronomy 24:19-21,

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.

Further, the Psalmists show that “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” (Psalm 68:5), and that “He sustains the fatherless and the widow” (Psalm 146:9), and Proverb 15:25 shows us that He is the One who sets the widow's boundary. He makes it clear in Jeremiah 49:11 when Jeremiah gave an oracle against Edom that although all of the men die, the orphans will find their protection in the Lord and the widows can trust Him.

### **Widowhood and Remarriage**

Paul reminded the church in Corinth about the lifetime bond of marriage and self-control in 1 Corinthians 7. In verses 8 and 9, he encourages widows to remain single but at the same time, gives them as well the freedom to remarry. In verse 39 of the same chapter, he confirms the law that he cited in Romans 7:2-3 about the wife being bound to the husband as long as the latter is alive and the freedom she has once the husband dies. Yet, he insists that the new husband “must belong to the Lord”. This is somehow

connected to what he, again, wrote to the church in Ephesus in 1 Timothy 5 when he advised the young widows to remarry.

God permitted remarriage after the death of the spouse. According to Ezekiel 44:22, priests who were widowers were allowed to remarry either virgins or widows. The only category of person who was not allowed to marry a widow was the high priest, as in Leviticus 21:14, “He must not marry a widow.”

The story of Tamar in Genesis 38 gives another case of organized remarriage for a widow. When Judah's firstborn son Er died, Judah gave Er's widow, Tamar, to become the wife of his second son, Onan. In such case, the widow has no say but had to accept because first it is the culture, and second because she and her husband did not have any children and it was Onan's duty to raise up offspring for his deceased brother from her. But Onan did what was wicked in the Lord's sight, so the Lord killed him. Again, it was Judah who decided that Tamar would remain a widow and would return to her family until Judah's other son would be old enough to marry her. Until then, she would be bound to the law and would not be able to remarry anyone she might want.

In the law that governs levirate marriage, the person who buys the land of the deceased man must also acquire his widow.<sup>32</sup> The application of such law results in remarriage, as what we see happened in Ruth 4.

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<sup>32</sup> Rob Fleenor, “Levirate Law,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. J. D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos version.

## Theological Framework of גֹּאֵל or Kinsman-Redeemer

גֹּאֵל or kinsman-redeemer as one aspect of God's provision for the widows

### Definition of גֹּאֵל

In the Jewish community, a גֹּאֵל is a man who has certain obligations or responsibilities towards a close relative. Hubbard explains that "*go'el* was a term from the realm of Israelite family law. It describes not a precise kinship relationship but the near relatives to whom both law and custom gave certain duties toward the clan (Leviticus 25:48–49)."<sup>33</sup>

### Responsibility of a גֹּאֵל in the Old Testament

Hubbard continues with the responsibility of a גֹּאֵל and explains that,

- (1) The *go'el* was responsible for the *g'ullâ*, the repurchase of property once owned by clan members but sold from economic necessity (Leviticus 25:25–30; Jeremiah 32:1–15). By restoring the land to its original owner, the *go'el* maintained the clan's inheritance intact.
- (2) If financially able, he also redeemed relatives whose poverty had forced them to sell themselves into slavery (Leviticus 25:47–55).
- (3) The *go'el haddam* (lit. "kinsman of blood") had the duty to avenge the killing of a relative by tracking down and executing the killer (Numbers 35:12, 19–27; Deuteronomy 19:6, 12; Joshua 20:2–3, 5, 9).
- (4) As responsible head of the clan, the *go'el* was the recipient of money paid as restitution for a wrong committed against someone now deceased (Numbers 5:8).
- (5) The word's metaphorical usage shows that the *go'el* also assisted a clan member in a lawsuit to see that justice was done (Job 19:25; Psalms 119:154; Proverbs 23:11; Jeremiah 50:34; Lamentation 3:58).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), Kindle.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, Kindle.

In addition to the ones mentioned above, *The Translator's Notes On Ruth*, adds that “If a man died without a son, the *go’el* was responsible for his widow. He could fulfill this responsibility by marrying her to provide for her needs and to produce, if possible, a son for the dead man’s family. This appears to be an extension of the levirate marriage custom.”<sup>35</sup>

The Lexham Bible Dictionary's explanation on redemption is that,

This kinsman-redeemer was a close male relative from the same clan. The closer the familial relation, the greater the obligation to redeem on behalf of the family member in need (Leviticus 25:25). The role was not restricted to immediate family (e.g., brother, father), as indicated by the inclusion of uncles and cousins in the potential list of kinsman-redeemers in Leviticus (Leviticus 25:49). Beyond this list, any blood relative from his clan could redeem (Leviticus 25:49). Essentially, whoever could redeem a relative should, with the greater responsibility falling to nearer kin.<sup>36</sup>

In the case of a widow, if her husband dies before they have a child / a heir and she is still young and is still of a childbearing age, the *לוי* is her husband's brother or if he had no brother, then it is the closest male relative on her husband's side. Therefore the brother-in-law has to marry her in order to provide a heir for her deceased husband and to continue his name in the family line. This is explicit in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 where we read that “If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and

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<sup>35</sup> Roger E. Doriot, *Translator's Notes On Ruth: Notes* (Dallas: SIL International, 1998), eBook in Paratext 7.5.100.87.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Lau, “Redemption,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. J. D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos version.

fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”

Levirate marriage in Bible times was viewed as a means to continue the family line and to ensure that the family name is kept through the son or sons, in addition to passing on the inheritance of the family property.<sup>37</sup>

In Ruth 4:10, Boaz applied the law of levirate and said: “I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records.” Therefore in the story of Ruth and Boaz, even if the baseline of levirate is for the family's sake, God uses the *גִּבּוֹר* to look after the widow, as a husband looking after his wife and children.<sup>38</sup> As Legget explains clearly,

Boaz as *goel* took upon himself the care and protection of the childless widow, Ruth, and married her in the exercise of a levirate-type responsibility. This action is best explained, not in terms of the historical development of the levirate institution, but as an example of a true *goel* whose life is governed by the covenant and by the loyal Israelite response to the covenant; in other words, *liesed*. The story of Ruth is that of *hesed* motivating and directing the life of an ordinary man within the covenant community to go beyond the demands of the letter of the levirate law.<sup>39</sup>

A *גִּבּוֹר* can refuse the act of redeeming. If the closest relative does not want to redeem, the next closest relative will take the responsibilities, as we see in Ruth 4. The

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<sup>37</sup> Donald A. Legget, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, UK: Mack Publishing Company, 1974), 52.

<sup>38</sup> Wycliffe Bible Translators, *Daily Life in Bible Times*, 1st ed. (Dallas, TX: Wycliffe Bible Translators, Inc., 1988), 70-74.

<sup>39</sup> Legget, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament*, 294.

act of redeeming therefore can be seen as a privilege or as a duty, and can be honored or rejected.

If there is no  $\text{לֵוִי}$  to marry the widow and she does not have a child, she is blessed to go back to her family like as we see in Ruth 1:8 when Naomi sent her two daughters-in-law back to their mother's homes to find husbands for them.

God gives the  $\text{לֵוִי}$  as a provision to the widow and her children for their needs, their protection, and their re-integration in the society.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter shows that God was the origin of culture. Different definitions were given about culture and yet, one thing is sure: it revolves around a group of people's beliefs that affect their way of life whether they realize it or not.

God instituted marriage for humanity although there are those He called to remain single, and it is culture that defines that institution in different ways. There are aspects of the institution of marriage that culture influences, which may not be biblical or not as God intended them to be. Such influences make people believe that the cultural inputs into the institution are a part of what God intended. On one hand, a cultural aspect of marriage begins where the society imposes the norms to be followed for a marriage to be legal in human eyes and ends when changes come into place because of external influences into the society, then it becomes a new aspect. On the other hand, the biblical aspect of marriage begins when God instituted marriage. It does not change neither with



time nor with space. God is the One who ordained marriage and what the society approves or does not approve does not influence God's view on marriage.

Marriage is a lifetime engagement that portrays God's desire to have an eternal relationship with His people even if that image was distorted by the Fall.

And lastly, God cares for the widows and the orphans. He provides for the poor and the marginalized in the society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON TRANSLATION, COMMUNICATION, AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

#### Introduction

Translation, communication, and contextualization are three concepts that one cannot avoid when translating. They involve players such as the translator or communicator, the receptor or audience, the text or the message, and the medium used. Different authors have different points of view related to the theories related to these three concepts.

In this part of the thesis-project, there will be a comparison and assessment of what different authors say about the three theories, how the concepts are applied to Bible translation, and how the authors address the issue of contextualization.

#### Translation

Anthony Pym's *Exploring Translation Theories* is one of the doors through which different translation theories and how they engage with each other can be understood. He underlines the functions of theories as raising productive questions, suggesting successful answers, and being significant agents of change, which is related to his “simple theory of translation: a problem is identified, possible solutions are generated, and one solution is selected.”<sup>1</sup> Although he writes that different theories can be of direct assistance in the

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories* (London: Routledge, 2010), 4.

translation process itself, he categorizes theories into two groups: those that are very good for the *generative* side, and the ones that are needed for the *selective* moment of translating. He afterwards demonstrates the necessity of having active discussions about different ways of solving translation problems in order to make the best use of theories.<sup>2</sup>

In the field of Bible translation, the name of Eugene A. Nida is well-known. Nida's focus in his work and experience in Bible translation was on functional or dynamic equivalence or meaning-based translation. Pym praised him for having developed the best-known theory of equivalence.<sup>3</sup> Nida authored books and articles related to that, but he also co-authored others.

Jan De Waard and Eugene A. Nida co-authored *From One Language to Another – Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, where they talk mainly about the importance of good communication in Bible Translation. In order to provide the best translation possible, the translator is supposed to at least have a thorough understanding of the source text and a good grasp of the target language and its speakers. The authors find functional equivalence to be a solution for good communication when translating and explain that “functional equivalence means thoroughly understanding not only the meaning of the source text but also the manner in which the intended receptors of a text are likely to understand it in the receptor language.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pym, *Exploring Translation*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Pym, *Exploring Translation*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene A. Nida and Jan de Waard, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence to Bible Translating* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 9.

The message of the Bible is important and certainly needs to be clear to its readers. “Purposeful obscurity, however, is not a general characteristic of the biblical writers. Most of what is obscure in the Scriptures is due to our own ignorance of the historical and cultural backgrounds of the message and not to the author's intent to convey a difficult message.”<sup>5</sup> Translating the Bible is then rendering the obscure message clear to its audience, aiming at providing “the closest natural equivalence of the message in the source language.”<sup>6</sup> This explains the definition by Nida and Taber (1969) that “translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.”<sup>7</sup>

De Waard and Nida provide the different functions of language and how languages operate to perform such functions in order to understand the basic principles of translation: expressive, cognitive, interpersonal, informative, imperative, performative, emotive, aesthetic, and metalingual.

Then, they explain the roles of the different players for a functionally equivalent translation. It is important that the translator, as the intermediate source, communicates the intention of the original author and avoids any personal opinion, ideology, or theology in his work.

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<sup>5</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation: Helps for Translators* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 12.

The receptors play an important role as well in translation. Their understanding of the translated text judges the quality of the translation. Two questions to consider are: “Can those for whom a translation has been prepared really understand what is meant or is the text both obscure and misleading?” and “Do the receptors understand the message in the correct manner?” The receptors are to use their knowledge, based on the use and customs of their language and culture because most of the time, the problem of understanding the message lies on the cultural level rather than on the linguistic one. And the other important player is the message. The message does not deal only with the content and the purpose of the writer but it envelops the tenor of the text in “the broader context of communication,” which is from the original context to the receptor's context.<sup>8</sup>

De Waard and Nida compare formal equivalence to dynamic or functional equivalence. The essence of functional equivalence is the comprehension of the receptors of the translation in the same way as the original receptors must have understood the original text, whereas a close formal correspondence in a receptor language frequently does not carry the meaning of the source text.<sup>9</sup> The authors then argue that the original receptors understood the idioms in their figurative sense but the receptors of the translation have no clue about the non-literal meaning in them. For that reason, the authors encourage changes to occur

- when a literal rendering would give an entirely wrong meaning;
- when a borrowed term constitutes a semantic “zero” and is therefore likely to be filled with the wrong meaning;

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<sup>8</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 32-36.

<sup>9</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 36-37.

- when a formal correspondence involves a serious obscurity in meaning;
- when a formal correspondence would result in an ambiguity evidently not intended by the original author; and
- when a formal correspondence would result in bad grammar or style in the receptor language.<sup>10</sup>

And they conclude that “languages do not differ significantly in what they can say but in how particular concepts are expressed.”<sup>11</sup>

Along the same line, the authors confirm that despite the expectation of faithfulness to the original text, translation is like any other form of communication where there is a loss during the process of communication. The degree of the loss varies depending on the differences between the linguistic and cultural frames of the original author and the receptor.

Pym looks at formal correspondence as 'natural equivalence.' He repeats Vinay and Darbelnet's view that “the linguists are seeking equivalents characterized as 'natural' precisely because those equivalents are supposed to have developed without interference from meddling linguists, translators, or other languages... The problem was to describe ways in which equivalence could be attained in all the situations where there was no obvious natural equivalence.”<sup>12</sup> So whereas De Waard and Nida give the different classifications of translation types (interlinear, literal, closest natural equivalent, adapted, and culturally reinterpreted), Pym makes a reference to Vinay and Darbelnet's seven general procedures as solutions to be used when natural equivalence is not available:

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<sup>10</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 38-39.

<sup>11</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Pym, *Exploring Translation*, 13.

loan, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, correspondence, and adaptation.<sup>13</sup>

De Waard and Nida's approach to translation is based on communication theory. "The focus is on the extent to which the meaning of the source text is transmitted to receptors in a form that they can understand and appreciate."<sup>14</sup> At the same time, they criticize themselves by showing the lack of adequate breadth in communication theory: there is no sufficient basis for understanding the nature of linguistic signs and no adequate insight into the relationship of language to culture.<sup>15</sup>

Katharine Barnwell is one of Nida's followers in terms of translation theories. She has been very confident and practical when it comes to meaning-based translation in Bible translation.

In her *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, she begins by proving that languages are different with regard to words, expressions, grammar and so on. And she underlines that "if the translator keeps too closely to the grammar and words of the original language, the translation may be unnatural, confusing, and it may even give the wrong meaning."<sup>16</sup>

Two kinds of translation that Barnwell compares are literal translation and meaning-based translation. She explains that literal translation is so close to the original

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<sup>13</sup> Pym, *Exploring Translation*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 184.

<sup>15</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 184.

<sup>16</sup> Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, 3rd ed. (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1986), 9.

message in terms of form, whereas a meaning-based translation aims at providing the exact meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the new language.<sup>17</sup> She agrees with De Waard and Nida that the order of the words and the expressions or idioms may change in order to give the most clear and natural meaning of the original message to the translation.<sup>18</sup>

Barnwell states that accuracy, clarity, and naturalness are the three most important qualities of a good translation. She defines them as

- Accurate: The translator must re-express the meaning of the original message as exactly as possible in the language into which he is translating.
- Clear: The translation should be clear and understandable. The translator aims to communicate the message in a way that people can readily understand.
- Natural: A translation should not sound 'foreign.' It should not sound like a translation at all, but like someone speaking in the natural, everyday way.<sup>19</sup>

Alongside that, Barnwell notes that “a word must always be translated by the meaning that it has in the particular context in which it occurs.”<sup>20</sup> Context is then important to determine the correct sense of a word. Just as Nida and Taber explain,

“Since words cover areas of meaning and are not mere points of meaning, and since in different languages the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical, it is inevitable that the choice of the right word in the receptor language to translate a word in the source-language text depends more on the context than upon a fixed system of verbal

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<sup>17</sup> Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, 55.



consistency, *i.e.*, always translating one word in the source language by a corresponding word in the receptor language.”<sup>21</sup>

Focusing on Bible translation, Barnwell pays particular attention to faithfulness to the historical text and communication effectiveness. These two facts need to be balanced although the original meaning intended by the original author can only be understood in light of the original context. On one hand, the translator must be faithful to the historical text: he must not change the message, the historical situation, and the cultural background of the original text. On the other hand, the translator must keep communication effectiveness: expressing the message in a way that the receptor will be able to understand correctly the meaning that the original author intended to communicate.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the translation must be historically accurate, what the original author meant, and clear to the receptor.

### **Relevance Theory**

Ronnie Sim's *Retelling Translation: A Handbook for Translators* is a good starting point to grasp relevance theory as it is so simple to understand and very practical. His research is not independent from his predecessors like Ernst-August Gutt and Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in the field of relevance theory and yet it is unique as it combines theory with practice.

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<sup>21</sup> Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Barnwell, *Bible Translation*, 84.

The first part of Sim's book focuses on understanding communication. He acknowledges the several different theoretical models of communication. Yet, he observes that “the best frameworks currently available for understanding communication are those which take human cognition as starting point, and develop cognitive approaches to linguistic pragmatics and communication.”<sup>23</sup> He then notices that in any given language, words and grammar communicate ideas,<sup>24</sup> thus the importance of understanding a text. Readers encounter difficulties when they do not have some contextual information at hand to help them understand what a text wants to communicate.<sup>25</sup> This view is parallel to Ernst R. Wendland's opinion in his article *Study Bible Notes for the Gospel of Luke in Chichewa*. Wendland states that

“No text is an 'island'. In other words, any meaningful combination of signs – oral or written, verbal or nonverbal – never occurs in communicative isolation, nor can it be interpreted solely on its own terms, with reference to itself alone. It must always be 'contextualised' (modified in form, content, and function) to a greater or lesser extent by means of other texts, that is, both 'intertextually', and also 'situationally' by the particular sociocultural context and communication setting, or occasion, within which it takes place.”<sup>26</sup>

Referring to Sperber and Wilson, Sim gives the two layers of information in communication, in the relevance-theoretic sense: *communicative intention*, which is a tacit claim that the speaker intends to communicate, and *informative intention* which is

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<sup>23</sup> Ronald J. Sim, *Retelling Translation: A Handbook for Translators, Volume 1: Foundations* (Pre-publication draft, Draft 2A, 2004), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst R. Wendland, “Study Bible Notes for the Gospel of Luke in Chichewa” in *Biblical Texts and African Audiences* (Africa: United Bible Societies, 2004), 120.

the information that the communicator intends to convey.<sup>27</sup> And he adds that “it is the presence of the communicative intention – alongside an informative intention – that separates communication from all other kinds of information transmission.”<sup>28</sup> It is called ostensive communication. These observations lead him to conclude that communication is ostensive behaviour: it is intentional and it is communicative. According to Sim, “ostensive communication conveys certain of the speaker's (limited) intentions, namely the ostensive ones, which consists in a communicative intention and a set of assumptions which form her informative intention.”<sup>29</sup>

Talking about context in communication, Sim explains that “communication brings about modifications in the mutual cognitive environment of both speaker and hearer. It does so by means of the interaction of the utterance with a context which the utterance itself evokes, and that it does so by making a set of assumptions mutually manifest or more manifest.”<sup>30</sup>

Sim pinpoints the importance of positive cognitive effects in the relevance of communication to any individual. In other words, cognitive effects define relevance. He mentions that “a communication is relevant if it leads the audience to derive new assumptions beyond those the utterance itself expresses or recalls from memory.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, the problem is that the new assumption can be true or false. Sperber and Wilson indicate

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<sup>27</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 48.

<sup>29</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 69.

that “things change when we move from relevance in a context to relevance to an individual (or more generally, to any cognitive system). Contextual effects in an individual are *cognitive effects*. They are changes in the individual's beliefs.”<sup>32</sup> This indicates that communication is not successful when there is no positive cognitive effect on the audience.

From Sim's explanation, we are led to understand that in relevance theory, communication is context-bound, and in an utterance, contextual effects are as important as the conveyed content. This means that by processing a text in its intended context, the audience brings about a further set of assumptions without any additional effort. When that occurs, communication is successful.

In the chapter on *Retelling* in his book, Sim remarks that translation is a kind of retelling as it implies an interpretive representation into a new language what has been said or written in another one. It is neither telling again nor reciting but a re-presentation of the original to a new audience. Surely, the wording in the two languages is different but the original and the retold version share almost the same information.<sup>33</sup> Despite the similarity of information conveyed in the two languages, Sim adds that “a retelling is still shaped by the audience's cognitive environment and is fully context dependent.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, the cognitive environment and context of the original audience are surely not the same as the cognitive environment and context of the reteller's audience. The communicator is

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<sup>32</sup> Dan Sperber and Wilson Deirdre, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1995), 265.

<sup>33</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 83.

then tied to relevance and context in what is to be retold, so even if he is free to use the wording he wants, he has no choice in what he wants to communicate since he needs to keep the intended message of the original. Also, one of the important factors that needs to be considered for a successful retelling is the reteller's understanding of the original communication because a reteller is under a constraint of faithfulness to the original. Sim calls retelling a secondary communication.

As stated previously, Sim's perspective is that “translation is a form of secondary communication. Translation is retelling a written text by a written text; the retelling is in a different language from that of the original communication. And the translated text is intended for a new, second audience.”<sup>35</sup> In translation, the translator as a reteller, must assure a successful communication just as the original writer successfully communicated to the original audience. That is achieved when the translator knows and understands the cognitive environment and context of both the original audience and his audience, then he stays faithful to the original and yet skilfully negotiates the meaning of the original for his audience. This is not far from what De Waard and Nida wrote on translating as communicating that “the task of a Bible translator as a secondary source is always a difficult one, since he is called upon to faithfully reproduce the meaning of the text in a form that will effectively meet the needs and expectations of receptors whose background and experience are very different from those who were original receptors of the biblical documents.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 120.

<sup>36</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 14.

In her book *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication*, Harriet Hill devotes the first three chapters to talk about relevance theory and the interrelatedness of text and context. She gives close attention to 'successful communication', which is the key to get the audience's attention.

Hill gives her opinion that the meaning-based based approach to translation is inadequate because much of the meaning in a text is encoded in the context. She writes in her introduction that “if people do not have access to the intended context, providing them with the biblical text alone is insufficient for successful communication.”<sup>37</sup>

Hill gives more attention to the fact that communication is successful when a relationship is well established between the communicator and his audience: the communication responds to the audience's interests. That involves getting the attention of the audience first and then keeping their attention with relevant products.<sup>38</sup>

On one hand, Hill argues that what Sperber and Wilson (1995:58) call “informative intent” is not sufficient for successful communication. She insists on getting the audience's attention if communication is to succeed. On the other hand, Hill shows that the issue is more complicated because having the information and getting the audience's attention are still insufficient. She claims that “communicators must not only have information and get the audience's attention, they must do so in such a way that the audience understands the meaning the communicator intends to convey.”<sup>39</sup> In other

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<sup>37</sup> Harriet S. Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006), Introduction.

<sup>38</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 2.

words, the communicator needs to discern the kind of translation products that will attract the attention of the audience. The communicator needs to know his audience and responds to his audience's need according to their expectations and cognitive environment. For that reason, the information that the communicator gives must be at the audience's level of understanding. The information needs to be delivered in a way that is acceptable, meaningful, trustworthy and relevant to the audience because “different audiences have different genres that they prefer.”<sup>40</sup> Acceptability touches the attitude of the communicator, the content of his message, the time and place the message is given, and the means that is used to deliver the message. Acceptability is very important in order to draw and keep the audience's attention from the beginning of the message. Therefore, the audience benefits from the information, and his cognitive environment improves, in other words, his knowledge is broadened. The communicator then has to think more of his audience when delivering his information rather than thinking of himself.

Hill's next topic is on the importance of context and comprehension in communication. She highlights that,

Relevance Theory is particularly helpful to Bible translators, because it provides a comprehensive model for understanding communication. It also provides conceptual tools for understanding how context is selected and built. This is extremely helpful, since contextual differences between the first and contemporary audiences of Scripture are large and must be addressed if communication is to succeed.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 14.

Hill continues her explanation of the importance of context since the combination of the text and the context brings out a meaning because “speakers always mean more than they say and the utterance meaning and the speaker's meaning are not synonymous. The same utterance then can have different meanings depending on the context in which it is processed.”<sup>42</sup> That also implies that the audience's understanding and/or interpretation may be different, even if the communicator and the audience share the same context. It is also true that communication would not be successful if the audience does not have the contextual assumptions that the speaker assumes they have.<sup>43</sup> In such a case, it is very possible that the audience would have an unexpected interpretation which is totally the opposite of the speaker's meaning or only partially in line with the speaker's meaning. The comprehension in communication is then limited by the shared context of the speaker and the audience, and that context is nothing but their mutual cognitive environment.

Another thing that Hill addresses is the challenge of building the intended context for audiences that lack it. The communicator's understanding of the function of context helps in providing “appropriate contextual adjustment materials so that communication is successful,” and “people everywhere can learn things outside their own experience, if it is presented in a relevant way.”<sup>44</sup> The process of a text is within a context and contextual adjustment materials need to be relevant to the audience in a way that it is linked with

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<sup>42</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 37.



their cognitive environment. Contextual adjustment materials must be comprehensible and must render the biblical text more understandable by providing only the necessary information that the audience needs and accepts.<sup>45</sup>

Hill then infers that “shared context can be built in the course of communication by building contextual bridges between known and new information. Shared context isn't built in a day.” That is because “different types of contextual mismatches call for different types of adjustments.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Skopostheorie**

Christiane Nord's book *Translating as a Purposeful Activity* advocates *Skopostheorie* as a translation theory. She focuses on the functionalist approach to translation and explains that “functionalism makes use of descriptive methods to locate and compare the communicative norms and conventions valid in various culture communities.”<sup>47</sup> Translation needs to be done in a way that the translated text could function well in the situation where it would be used, as she affirms “in translation, the chosen informational items are then transferred to the target culture using the presentation the translator believes appropriate for the given purpose.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), 2.

<sup>48</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 26.

Nord helps her readers to understand that in *Skopostheorie*, the purpose of the overall translational action primarily determines any translation process.<sup>49</sup> She refers to Vermeer (1989a:20) with reference to 'Skopos rule' that “each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose.”<sup>50</sup>

For that reason, she highlights the need for a *translation brief* before any translational action because it not only specifies the kind of translation that is needed but it also sets the aim of the translation.<sup>51</sup> Although the source text is usually part of the translation brief, the target culture determines the viability of the brief.<sup>52</sup> In other words, it is only after the agreement between the translator and the target audience on the expected kind of translation and the reason for the translation that the translator should make the decision on the translation strategy he is going to adopt.

Like De Waard and Nida who consider the translator as the secondary or intermediate source who communicates the original author's intention, Nord sees the translator as “the real receiver of the source text.” The translator's task is to produce a functional target text that meets the demands of the translation brief.<sup>53</sup> She defends Vermeer's idea of a *dethronement* of the source text that “the source text is just one of the various sources of information used by the translator,” the translator's decision does not

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<sup>49</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 30.

<sup>52</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 21.

first and foremost depend on it any longer.<sup>54</sup> She states that “a target text is an offer of information formulated by a translator in a target culture and language about an offer of information formulated by someone else in the source culture and language (cf. Reiss and Vermeer 1984:67ff).”<sup>55</sup> The translator then creates a new target text by offering the information made by the source text to a new audience. The target text is guided by the translator's assumptions, which are obviously different from those made by the original author, about the audience's needs, expectations, previous knowledge, and so on. The assumptions are different because the cultures and the languages communities are different.<sup>56</sup>

One of the principles that Nord emphasizes is the *loyalty principle*. To her, function *plus* loyalty are the pillars of the functionalist approach. What makes the target-text work the way the target-audience expects is function and “loyalty refers to the interpersonal relationship between the translator, the source-text sender, the target-text addressees and the initiator.”<sup>57</sup> Nord clarifies that

the loyalty principle takes account of the legitimate interests of the three parties involved: initiators (who want a particular type of translation), target receivers (who expect a particular relationship between original and target texts) and original authors (who have a right to demand respect for their individual intentions and expect a particular kind of relationship between their text and its translation). If there is any conflict between the

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<sup>54</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 126.

interests of the three partners of the translators, it is the translator who has to mediate and, where necessary, seek the understanding of all sides.<sup>58</sup>

### **Contextualization and Bible Translation**

One of the books considered worth a short review in this section is

*Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* by David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen. The book focuses on a survey of the history of contextualization in Bible and church history. Although the authors do not talk primarily about contextualization in Bible translation, the book helps the reader to get an overview of the reasons for contextualization. Once the concept is understood, it is easier to apply it in different disciplines, including Bible translation. Therefore, I chose to review a few chapters that are related to this thesis-project.

Hesselgrave and Rommen share that the new word “contextualization” was born at the point when “a new word was needed to denote the ways in which we adjust messages to cultural contexts and go about the doing of theology itself.”<sup>59</sup> Afterwards, the book leads its reader through different proposals to see the major components of all cross-cultural communication and contextualization:

- to bridge the gap between the communicator and the culture which informed the biblical texts and

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<sup>58</sup> Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*, 127-128.

<sup>59</sup> David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000) 28.

- to introduce that text's informed understanding into another cultural matrix.<sup>60</sup>

This is backed up by De Waard and Nida's condition that “if a Bible translator is to do his work well, he must become an intellectual bridge which permits receptors to pass over the chasms of language and culture to comprehend, in so far as possible, the full implications of the original communication.”<sup>61</sup>

The authors then realize that contextualization is best done within the receiving cultural context by the receiving community.

When it comes to contextualization and the Biblical text, the authors claim that the meaning of the biblical text should be faithfully respected in contextualization. In other words, no matter what process was followed in contextualization, the meaning of the text should not change and can always be traced.<sup>62</sup> They affirm that there is no one single culture in the world, which implies that there is no one correct way of doing contextualization.<sup>63</sup> Such a claim supports Nida and Taber on contextual consistency when they write,

Since words cover areas of meaning and are not mere points of meaning, and since in different languages the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical, it is inevitable that the choice of the right word in the receptor language to translate a word in the source language text depends more on the context than upon a fixed system of verbal

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<sup>60</sup> Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 126.

<sup>61</sup> De Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another*, 14.

<sup>62</sup> Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 201-202.

<sup>63</sup> Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 203.

consistency, *i.e.*, always translating one word in the source language by a corresponding word in the receptor language.<sup>64</sup>

In his article “Study Bible Notes for the Gospel of Luke in Chichewa,” Wendland classifies contextualization into two groups: “negative” contextualization and “positive” contextualization. Although his observations were focused on the Study Bible Notes in Chichewa, I find the seven points that he notes on negative contextualization as warnings to translators to keep them faithful to the original in a way that is meaningful to their audience. The seven points are:

- Redundancy: the readers are confused because of the repetition of information that they should already be able to determine from the text itself;
- Brevity: not enough of the required information is supplied for the understanding of the text;
- Errancy: the provided information is not entirely correct;
- Paucity: a local cultural equivalent or familiar correspondent is not supplied;
- Indeterminacy: discussion of issues that cannot really be resolved or specified precisely;
- Controversy: comments on a matter of dispute or debate that may not even be necessary;
- Technicality: too much detail for the audience concerned.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Wendland, *Study Bible Notes for the Gospel of Luke in Chichewa*, 127-130.

In his *La traduction de la Bible et l'Eglise*, Michel Kenmogne dedicates a chapter on contextualization in Bible translation about whether it is a privilege or a trap. Since the book aims at helping the Church in Africa to actively participate in the ministry of Bible translation, Kenmogne mainly addresses African theologians. He notes that in Bible translation, it is essential that the theologian understands his own cultural context and assesses it in light of the Bible, that the Bible story is told faithfully and that his culture is not superimposed on the biblical text.<sup>66</sup>

Kenmogne suggests that one of the ways for African theologians to contribute in the process of Bible translation is to identify the parallels or the meeting points between the Bible and the African culture. Therefore, exegesis needs to be done taking into account the post-colonial and post-independence African context. Kenmogne judges from his own perspective that there are a number of traps in this approach as people tend to compare their own culture with the socio-historical world of the Bible only to validate some African religious and cultural activities while the connection between the two is not justified.<sup>67</sup>

According to Kenmogne, Bible translation in the mother tongue is a concrete act of a vast contextualization, adapting God's message to the linguistic and cultural context of the target people.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Michel Kenmogne, *La Traduction de la Bible et l'Eglise: Enjeux et Défis pour l'Afrique Francophone* (Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 2009), 123.

<sup>67</sup> Kenmogne, *La traduction de la Bible et l'Eglise*, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Kenmogne, *La traduction de la Bible et l'Eglise*, 128.

Although the author reminds his readers a number of times and in different ways that Bible translation is the context of the chapter, Kenmogne focuses more on contextual theology rather than on contextualizing Bible translation. Yet, one thing that he insists on is the importance of context both in Bible translation and in theology.

In response to the views of the writers above, what Robert Bascom writes simply in his article “The Role of Culture in Translation” is very practical. He notes that “Mother-tongue speakers of the target language are the only ones who can be expected to have anything close to an adequate grasp of the implicit aspects of communication which lie below the surface of explicit expression.”<sup>69</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter contains different perspectives from different authors. Each author values translation and looks for the best way to couple theory with practice. They may have different opinions but one thing that cannot be denied is that translating is communicating in a way that speaks best to the target audience, in their culture and context. The choice of words and translation styles does not depend on the translator alone although the translator is the one who does the actual work of translating. Translation is not adaptation, it is communication.

This literature review underscores the importance of effectively communicating the meaning of *l'Évangile* in Malagasy. The translators are the medium to communicate the

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Bascom, “The Role of Culture in Translation,” in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, ed. Timothy Wilt (Manchester: St. Jerome’s Press, 2003), 22.



intended meaning of the original message to the secondary audience and contextualization serves as a solution used to achieve a clear rendering linguistically and culturally. Although the concept of ንጽሕ is obscure to the Malagasy audience because of their ignorance of the original context and culture, it can be rendered clear to them through contextualization.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION OF **ḡḡ**

#### Introduction

This chapter explains the details of my research regarding the understanding of **ḡḡ** in the Malagasy Church. It is mainly based on the author's observation. A questionnaire was developed from the author's knowledge of the culture and the context in Antananarivo, Madagascar.

In the first part, the focus is on the analysis of the Malagasy translation for **ḡḡ**, mainly in the book of Ruth. That part will touch not only the morphosyntactic studies of the translation but also the semantic studies of it in the Malagasy context.

The second part of this chapter will lean towards the analysis of the feed-back from the questionnaire to define the understanding of the translation of **ḡḡ** in Malagasy. A qualitative data collection was used for my research. This part will end with the result of the assessment on how the concept of **ḡḡ** is understood through its translation.

#### **ḡḡ** and its Translation

##### The Verb **ḡḡ**

Before going into the noun **ḡḡ**, it is important to have a glimpse on the verb related to it.

לָאֵל is a participle deriving from the Hebrew verb לָאֵל. In Hebrew, the verb לָאֵל has three meanings:<sup>1</sup>

1. to act as kinsman, to do the part of next of kin:

- in taking a kinsman's widow
- in redeeming from bondage
- in redeeming a field
- to claim as kinsman
- the avenger of blood

2. to redeem, by payment of value assessed, of consecrated things, by the original owner

3. to redeem, with God as subject implying personal relationship, chiefly in poetry:

- individuals, from death
- Israel, from Egyptian bondage
- from exile

### The Noun לָאֵל in the Book of Ruth

Since the definition of לָאֵל was given in the second chapter of this thesis-project, the author will pay more attention to the book of Ruth as a case study in this section.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, לָאֵל in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 8<sup>th</sup> Printing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 145.

The research was based on the Malagasy Protestant version of the Bible and so this version will be the centre of the study. Yet, the Malagasy Catholic version will be considered for a comparison.

Naomi focuses on Boaz's kinship to her and to Ruth, and yet, her point was mainly for Ruth to be married, not on having heirs (3:1-2). Hubbard explained that

First, in saying that Boaz was *our* kinsman-redeemer, Naomi cleared away ambiguity about Ruth's social status. In her view, Ruth was definitely a family member entitled to the benefits of a *go'el*. Second, Naomi introduced the prospect of help from Boaz, perhaps even of marriage for Ruth—a key item which anticipates the scheme of chapter 3. Third, the statements elevated the role of Boaz and thereby opened up new narrative possibilities. He was no longer simply a prominent, good-hearted Israelite; rather, he was a near relative with duties toward the women.<sup>2</sup>

Two kinds of redemption are found here. The first one is the redemption of land which belonged to Elimelech that Naomi had sold and the second one is to marry Ruth, a widow who was childless at the death of her husband and who still had the potential to bear children. In the case of Naomi and Ruth, the לֵאמֹן who redeems the land has to take Ruth as a wife too as stipulated by Boaz to the first kinsman-redeemer in Ruth 4:5: “On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.” Hubbard explained that it means:

to perpetuate the existence of the dead on his ancestral property. That required the kinsman to redeem the land and to marry the widow in the hope of providing a son to inherit it. Thus, the connection Boaz makes between redemption of land and marriage to Ruth conforms to good

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), 189, Kindle.

Israelite practice and is not an arbitrarily imposed “condition of sale” which only approximated that practice. This explanation implies, further, that the surprise element in Boaz’s second demand must be something other than the simple fact of marrying a widow, since that duty was implicit in the duty to redeem land.<sup>3</sup>

By the redemption, Ruth would receive the protection that she needed in the eyes of the society. She would also be released from widowhood and would have children, hopefully sons, to maintain her deceased husband's name.

In chapters 3 and 4 of the book, Boaz acknowledges that he is not the first **לִקְדָּם**. He cannot skip the one who is closer to Elimelech than him. If that first one declines the responsibilities, then he has the right to take them. The first **לִקְדָּם** is interested in redeeming the land but not in taking Ruth, so at the end, he declines the offer. That gives way to Boaz because he is the next **לִקְדָּם**.

In the Book of Ruth, “redeem” or “redeemer” occurs 21 times, in reference to both Naomi’s land and Ruth herself;<sup>4</sup> and “redemption” occurs once.

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic
2:20	<b>לִקְדָּם</b>	kinsman- redeemer	être chargé de prendre soin de quelqu'un	(havana) mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), 1144-1146, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Parker and A. L. Balogh, “Redeemer,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. J. D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos version.

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic
3:9	גָּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	avoir la responsabilité d'un proche parent à l'égard de quelqu'un	havana mahavotra	havana mahazo manavotra
3:12	גָּאֵל	near of kin	avoir la responsabilité d'un proche parent à l'égard de quelqu'un	havana mahavotra	mahazo manavotra (active verb)
	גָּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	<i>not translated</i>
3:13	<i>ga'al</i> וְגָאֵלְךָ	redeem (verb- cond.)	exercer une responsabilité à l'égard de quelqu'un	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra
	<i>ga'al</i> וְגָאֵלְךָ	redeem (verb- inf.)	(exercer une responsabilité à l'égard de quelqu'un)	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra
	<i>ga'al</i> וְגָאֵלְךָ	(redeem) (verb- inf.)	(exercer une responsabilité à l'égard de quelqu'un)	(hanavotra) (verb-FUT)	hanavotra
	<i>ga'al</i> וְגָאֵלְךָ	(redeem) (verb- FUT)	exercer une responsabilité à l'égard de quelqu'un	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra
4:1	גָּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic
4:3	גָּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mpanavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra
4:4	<i>ga'al</i> תִּגְאָל	redeem (verb- FUT)	exercer le droit de rachat	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra (verb-FUT)
	<i>ga'al</i> גָּאֵל	(redeem) (verb- impv.)	(exercer le droit de rachat)	avoty (verb- impv.)	avoty (verb- impv.)
	<i>ga'al</i> יִגְאָל	(redeem) (verb- FUT)	<i>not translated</i>	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	(hanavotra) (verb-FUT)
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגָאוֹל	<i>not translate d</i>	<i>not translated</i>	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	olona mahazo manavotra
	<i>ga'al</i> אֶגְאָל	redeem (verb- FUT)	acheter	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra (verb-FUT)
4:6	גָּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגָאוֹל	redeem	<i>not translated</i>	manavotra (verb-PRES)	manavotra (verb-PRES)
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגָאוֹל inf. construct	redeem (verb- impv.)	exercer le droit de rachat	avoty (verb- impv.)	manavotra (verb-inf.)
	<i>ga'al</i> גָּאֵל	redeem (verb- impv.)	exercer le droit de rachat	mahavotra (verb-PRES)	manavotra (verb-PRES)

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic
4:7	הַאֲחֵי noun, fem, sing	redemption	acheter des biens ou un droit de propriété	fanavotana	fanavotana
4:8	הָאָח	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra
4:14	הָאָח	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	mpanavotra

Table 1: Occurrences of הָאָח in Ruth

### Morphosyntax and Semantics around *Havana Mahavotra*

#### Definitions and Semantic Interpretations of *Havana*

Rajemisa-Raolison defines *havana* as:

- people who are related because of common ancestors,
- people who are related because of marriage,
- someone who has a close relationship with you like a best friend.<sup>5</sup>

He continues with the categories of relatives in the society. *Havana akaiky* is the term used for near relatives like siblings, the children of the siblings or first cousins.

From second cousins on, they are called *lafi-kavana*. When people are related but have to study the family tree to find out about their relationship, they are called *havan-davitra*.

And if two people are related but don't know about it because the blood relationship is generations away, they are distant relatives and are called *havan-tetezina*.

<sup>5</sup> Régis Rajemisa-Raolison, "Havana," in *Rakibolana Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa: Ambozontany, 1995), 420.



The idea of a relative does not necessarily mean that the two people are blood-related. Good friends are called relatives, and so are people from the same village or from the same people group. Outside Madagascar, when Malagasy people meet, even if it is for the first time, they feel that tie of being relatives because they are from the same country.

In the book of Ruth, the term “kinsman-redeemer” suggests that the redeemer and the one to be redeemed are relatives (Ruth 2:1). Yet, according to what we saw in the definitions of *havana*, Boaz was a *lafi-kavana* since he was not a direct cousin of the deceased man and nothing tells the reader if he is a second cousin or not. All that is known is that there is someone else, a closer relative to Naomi's husband than him (Ruth 3:12) and Boaz is the second closest to the family. Although the concept of *lafi-kavana* is understood and well-known in the Malagasy context, the term is only used when an explanation about the relationship between two people is needed. Otherwise, *havana* is always used in everyday life.

### **Morphosyntax Studies of *Mahavotra***

#### *The Different Voices in the Malagasy Grammar*

According to the Malagasy grammar, the Malagasy language has three voices: active, passive, and relative.<sup>6</sup> Hence, knowing the different voices in the Malagasy grammar gives us an idea of the functionality of the language.

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Bruno Rabenilaina and Jean-Yves Morin, *Vitasoa: Dictionnaire Français - Malgache* (Antananarivo: Editions Ambozontany, 2015), 13.

The **active voice** is marked by the use of the prefix *mx-*. *m-* indicates the present tense in the active voice, interchanges with *n-* in the past and *h-* in the future; and *-x-* represents *-ø-*, *-am-*, *-an-*, *-añ-*, *-aña-*, *-anka-*, *-aha-*, and *-i-*.

The **passive voice** is marked by the use of one of the following affixes:

- prefix: *ø-*, *a-*, *voa-*, *tafa-*

- infix: *-in-*

- suffix: *-ana*, *-ina*

The **relative voice** is represented with the use of the circumfix *x- ... -ana*, where *x-* is the prefix of the active and *-ana* is the suffix of the passive.

#### *Morphosyntax of the Derivatives of Avotra*

The adjective *avotra* means “saved or redeemed.” Any affix added to the adjective carries the intended meaning of a word in a given context.

Active Voice: *manavotra* [man-avotra]

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence is the one doing the action and the object is the one receiving the action.

The prefix that is normally used with *avotra* is *man-* in the active voice. The addition of the suffix *man-* to *avotra* provides different meanings to the newly formed transitive verb, depending on the context.

*Manavotra* is usually translated into “to redeem” or “to save.”<sup>7</sup> It is used in a sentence in the active form, and it has three meanings depending on the context it is used:

- to find ways to save a person from a danger, to save

E.g.: *Nanavotra ilay zaza tamin'ny fahafatesana ny mpitsabo.*

Saved the child from (PAST) death the doctor

→ The doctor saved the child from death.

- to free someone from slavery

E.g.: *Afaka manavotra andevo maro ny olona manakarena.*

Can redeem slave many the person rich

→ A rich person can redeem many slaves.

- to buy back what belonged to you

E.g.: *Mikasa hanavotra ilay trano namidiko tamin'ny taona lasa aho.*

Plan redeem(FUT) the house sold-I (PAST) year gone I

→ I plan to redeem the house I sold last year.

The noun from *manavotra* is *mpanavotra*, the person who redeems. This is a term that is frequently used when talking about Jesus as our Redeemer although in the Old Testament, it is used when talking about God redeeming His people. The use of the prefix

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<sup>7</sup> Rajemisa-Raolison, “Manavotra,” in *Rakibolana Malagasy*, 599.

*mp-* which designates the habitual aspect of a noun means that redeeming is the habitual function of the person, that is what he does in his everyday life.

Passive Voice: *voavotra* [voa-(a)votra]

The focus is on the action. The subject is the one receiving the action and the one doing the action becomes the object.

Here, the prefix *voa-* conveys that the action comes from an agent external to the object and is complete. It is used for the passive form of transitive verbs with the prefix *man-*, and keeps the meaning of the verb 'to be able to do something.'

E.g.: *Voavotr'i Boaza i Rota.*

→ Ruth was redeemed by Boaz.

*Voavotra i Rota.*

→ Ruth was redeemed.

Relative Voice: *avotana* [ø-avot(ra)-ana] OR *anavotana* [an-avot(ra)-ana]

The relative is always in a continuous form regardless of the tense of the verb; the focus is on the one who is affected by the action and the sentence keeps the intended meaning even if the one doing the action is not mentioned.

The relative is expressed by the circumfix *ø- ... -ana*, or *an- ... -ana* added to the root. The difference between two circumfixes is that the second one requires an instrument or a means to accomplish the action.

E.g. *Avotana i Rota*.

→ Ruth is being redeemed. (The action is happening although there is no mention of the actor.)

*Avotan'i Boaza i Rota*.

→ Ruth is being redeemed by Boaz. (Boaz is in the middle of the action of redeeming Ruth.)

*Anavotan'i Boaza an'i Rota ny fanambadiany azy*

→ Boaz is redeeming Ruth by marrying her. (Marriage is the means for the redemption.)

Furthermore, *fanavotana*, act of redeeming, is the translation for 'redemption.' The prefix *f-* is called a 'noun prefix'. It is usually combined with the circumfix of the relative *a(n)- ... -ana* in order to obtain a relative substantive. Here we have:

*f- an- avot(ra) -ana*

### *Morpho-Syntax of Mahavotra*

This is the combination of the prefix *maha-* and the adjective *avotra*. Depending on the context, *mahavotra* can either be a verb or an adjective.

#### *Mahavotra as a Verb*

The verb *mahavotra* is classified as a potential verb. Richardson supposes in his dictionary that the prefix *maha-* is probably derived from the verb *mahay*, to be able. Its

use is wider than that of the other prefixes, as it may be added to almost any word or phrase in the language. The prefix *maha-* may be called 'the potential prefix'. It is mainly used to express the ability/capacity or the power to perform any action, or simply “to be able to do something,” or what makes a thing to be what it is.<sup>8</sup>

E.g.: *Mahavotra*                      *an'i*    *Rota*    *i*            *Boaza*.

Is able to redeem/save det.    Ruth    det.    Boaz

→ Boaz is able to redeem/save Ruth. (Boaz has the capacity to redeem Ruth).

Later on, Rajemisa-Raolison added that in an active verb, the prefix *maha-* shows the cause of the change of state of the adjective that serves as a root to the verb.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, Rabenilaina & Morin gave more explanation about the prefix *maha-*. They explained that sometimes *maha-* is used as a verbal prefix in the active voice and is associated with the circumfix *aha-* ... *-ana* in the relative voice; sometimes it plays the role of an affixal operator, interchangeable with an operator verb. It is attached to the word it prefixes when the newly formed verb is associated with a relative verb. In this case, the root of the verb is either an adjective or a passive.<sup>10</sup>

E.g.: *salama*: healthy

*mahasalama*: what makes one healthy, with *maha-* changing the state of the noun

'healthy' into 'the cause for making one healthy' → active

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<sup>8</sup> J. Richardson, ed., “Maha-, or Mah-,” in *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary* (Antananarivo: The London Missionary Society, 1885), 404-405.

<sup>9</sup> Régis Rajemisa-Raolison, *Grammaire Malgache* (Antananarivo: Imprimerie Catholique, 1961), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Rabenilaina and Morin, *Vitasoa*, 17.

↔ *manome fahasalamana*: what gives health

*ahasalamana*: with which health is gained → relative

*fahasalamana*: health

### *Mahavotra* as an Adjective

One of the forms of the qualifying adjectives in Malagasy is the active verb form with the prefix *ma-*, *man-*, *maha-*, and *mi-*.<sup>11</sup>

Let us have a look at the previous example for a comparison:

E.g.: *Mahavotra*                      *an'i*    *Rota*    *i*            *Boaza*.

Is able to redeem/save            det.    Ruth    det.    Boaz

→ Boaz is able to redeem/save Ruth.

=> Here, *mahavotra* plays the role of an active verb with a potential aspect.

*Havana*            *mahavotra*                      *i*            *Boaza*.

Relative            is able to redeem/save            det.    Boaz

→ Boaz is a relative who is able to redeem/save.

=> Here, *mahavotra* qualifies *havana* and both *havana* and *mahavotra* point to Boaz. The sentence can be split into two and will give two short sentences, still talking about Boaz.

(1) *Havana*    *i*            *Boaza*.

Relative    det.    Boaz

→ Boaz is a relative.

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<sup>11</sup> Rajemisa-Raolison, *Grammaire Malgache*, 108.

(2) *Mahavotra i Boaza*.

Is able to redeem/save     det.     Boaz

→ Boaz is able to redeem/save. (There is no mention and no hint of who or what is being redeemed)

It is important to note one aspect of the prefix *maha-* mentioned in *Vitasoa*.

Rabenilaina & Morin mentioned that *maha* can be used as an autonomous unit that is separated from the word that follows it when that last one is

- a noun, as in *maha olona*: that makes/constitutes a person
- a personal pronoun, as in *maha izy azy*: that makes him him (ie, forms his personality)
- a locative pronoun, as in *maha eto*: that makes (us) here
- an adjective, as in *maha torovana*: that makes (us) exhausted

Such cases cannot be associated with the verb form with circumfix and therefore do not accept the relative forms either.<sup>12</sup>

That explanation was preceded by Andrianony when he mentioned in his grammar book that there are two ways of using the prefix *maha*.<sup>13</sup> First, if the word to be prefixed expresses a progressive state or a state of becoming, then the prefix is attached to the word. As a result, the new formed word is a verb.

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<sup>12</sup> Rabenilaina and Morin, *Vitasoa*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Andrianony, *Gramera na Fianarana ny Fiteny Malagasy* (Antananarivo: Imprimerie Mami, 1966), 58.



Eg.: *Mahafaly ny ankizy ny lalao.*

Makes happy det. child(ren) det. game

→ The game makes the child(ren) happy: The child or the children are not happy but the game makes them happy → progressive change of state

And second, if the word to be prefixed expresses a state that is already attained or acquired, *maha* does not join the word it prefixes but works as an autonomous unit.

Eg.: *Ny fanahy no maha olona.*

Det. spirit particle make person

→ The spirit (character) is what makes a person: The person is already a person but his personality is defined by his character.

### **Semantic Problems of *Havana Mahavotra***

Considering the understanding and use of the verb *manavotra* in the Malagasy context nowadays, the meaning used in everyday life, is only “to save (from a problem).” It might be because of the fact that slavery is no longer practised and goods once sold cannot be replaced or claimed back so the act of redeeming is no longer part of everyday life.

A Christian who knows the Bible would relate the verb *manavotra* to the saving act of Jesus on the cross. No one would think of the real meaning of that verb in the book of Ruth although the story is very well known.

The following explanation is then based on the present understanding of the verb *manavotra* which is applied to its derivative *mahavotra*. A few sentences showing the different use of *havana* and *mahavotra* will be considered here.

Sentence 1: *Havana i Boaza.*

Relative det. Boaz

→ Boaz is a relative.

This sentence is grammatically correct, yet clumsy. In a spoken conversation, this sentence can be used when the people conversing already know the setting and the context, but a meaning is missing in this sentence in a written form as nothing indicates to whom Boaz is related if the context is not set. Thus, we need to add an object which indicates the possession or possessive case.

Sentence 1 becomes

*Havan' i Naomy i Boaza.*

Relative (of) det. Naomi det. Boaz

→ Boaz is a relative of Naomi.

Sentence 2: *Mahavotra i Boaza.*

Is able to save det. Boaz

→ Boaz is able to save.

The same case as in sentence 1 is presented here in sentence 2. The sentence is grammatically correct but the meaning is awkward. If *mahavotra* is used as a verb, then it needs an object because the verb is transitive. The expected outcome would give an

answer to the question 'Who/What is Boaz able to save?' Sentence 2 does not even determine if Boaz is able to save someone or something. Without a context, the sentence would not make any sense to the reader.

In such a case, sentence 2 becomes

*Mahavotra an'i Rota i Boaza.*

Is able to save det. Ruth det. Boaz

→ Boaz is able to save Ruth.

The meaning in this last rendering presupposes that Ruth has problems and is in need of some kind of help. But if the reader does not know what has happened to Ruth at that particular moment, he is led to ask 'saving Ruth from who or from what?' Such a question needs to be answered for the sentence to have a clear meaning.

Now then,

*Mahavotra an'i Rota amin'ny fahantrana i Boaza.*

Is able to save det. Ruth from poverty det. Boaz

→ Boaz is able to save Ruth from poverty.

An adjective always follows the noun that it qualifies. If *mahavotra* is supposed to be an adjective, then it is an adjective with an active verb form. The meaning of the adjective is the same as the meaning of the verb. Therefore, the context and its place in the phrase or sentence define whether *mahavotra* is a verb or an adjective. For that reason, the combination *havana mahavotra* can be considered as correct.

The problem is that although the formation of *mahavotra* is grammatically correct as an adjective with a verb form, it does not convey any meaning that is able to qualify the noun that it follows.

According to Rajemisa, one aspect of an adjective in Malagasy is that abstract nouns can be formed by adding the prefix *ha-* or *faha-* to a root adjective or by substituting *f-* to *m-* to an adjective with an active verb form with the prefix *man-*, *maha-*, or *mi-*. In both cases, the presence of the suffix *-ana* is optional to form the noun.<sup>14</sup>

Here is a comparative example of two root adjectives becoming abstract nouns.

<i>avotra</i> – saved, redeemed	<i>adala</i> – crazy, mad, insane
<i>ha+avotra+ana</i> → <i>havotana</i> *	<i>ha+adala+ana</i> → <i>hadalana</i> – craziness
<i>faha+avotra+ana</i> → <i>fahavotana</i> *	<i>faha+adala+ana</i> → <i>fahadalana</i> – craziness

Table 2: Root adjective becoming a noun

The next table is a comparative example of two adjectives with an active verb form becoming abstract nouns.

<i>mahavotra</i> – that makes someone/ something saved	<i>mahasoa</i> – that makes someone/something good
<i>m</i> → <i>f+ahavotra</i> → <i>fahavotra</i> *	<i>m</i> → <i>f+ahasoa</i> → <i>fahasoa</i> – beauty
<i>m</i> → <i>f+ahavotra+ana</i> → <i>fahavotana</i> *	<i>m</i> → <i>f+ahasoa+v+ana</i> → <i>fahasoavana</i> – goodness

Table 3: Adjective with an active verb form becoming a noun

<sup>14</sup> Rajemisa-Raolison, *Grammaire Malgache*, 26.

In the two tables, the sign (\*) shows that the word does not carry any meaning and/or that the formation of the word is not correct.

From the above tables, the active verb *mahavotra* does not make any sense if used as an adjective.

To the author's knowledge, there is no instance and no evidence that it is used to qualify other words apart from *havana mahavotra*, which is only used in the translation of *לָאֵל* in the book of Ruth. In other books in the Bible, *לָאֵל* is translated differently.

### **The Understanding of *Havana Mahavotra* in a Malagasy Setting**

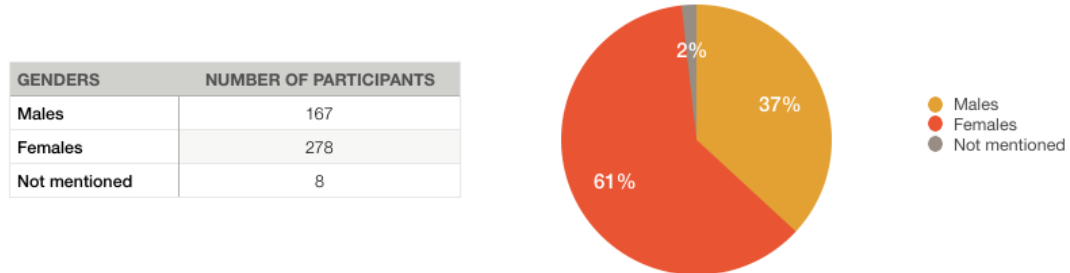
#### **Observation: The Questionnaire**

After a consultation with Dr Bryan C. Auday, research professor at Gordon College, the questionnaire that I wrote for my research was approved to be used to collect my data.

#### **The Participants**

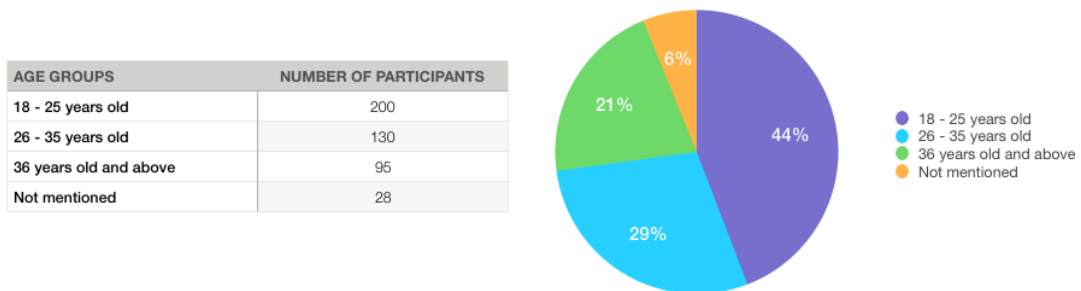
The research was conducted at a local church in Madagascar. The church has 4 services on Sundays and the author was given one Sunday to make an announcement in each service about the questionnaire and how people could participate. After each service, those who attended the service were free to pick up the questionnaire at a distribution point in the church yard, one questionnaire per person. The questionnaire was anonymous and there is no way to know the participants individually.

600 questionnaire sheets were taken away and 453 feed-backs received, of which 167 were from males, 278 from females, and 8 did not mention their gender.



*Table 4: Participants per gender*

The questions were straightforward and clear, so no specific instructions were given to the participants except that they must be 18 years of age and older to participate. The following is a table with the chart of the number of participants according to their age group.



*Table 5: Participants per age group*

## The Questionnaire

The questionnaire has 7 questions: the first 3 questions are more focused on the familiarity of the participant with the book of Ruth and the other 4 questions are focused on the understanding of *havana mahavotra* in the biblical context and in the Malagasy context. The last question is combined with a suggested solution from the participant on how to best render *go'el* in Malagasy according to their understanding of the concept.

The questionnaire ends with a space for any remark that the participant might have.

The questionnaire in Malagasy accompanied with its free translation in English is found in the appendices.

Although 453 feed-backs were received, not all of the participants answered all of the questions. Here is a table summarizing the people's participation for each question.

QUESTIONS	Responses	No responses	% participation
Q1	450	3	99,34
Q2	391	62	86,31
Q3	360	93	79,47
Q4	403	50	88,96
Q5	423	30	93,38
Q6	375	78	82,78
Q7	376	77	83,00

Table 6: Participants for each question

From the above result, it can be concluded that the participants were active in answering the questionnaire.

#### Confirmation of my Observation

As already mentioned, the seven questions were grouped into two categories: familiarity with the book of Ruth and the understanding of *havana mahavotra* in both the biblical and Malagasy context.

#### The Malagasy Audience and the Book of Ruth

450 responses were received regarding the familiarity of the participants with the book of Ruth in Question 1. The following table and chart measure the result of the participants' reading rate.

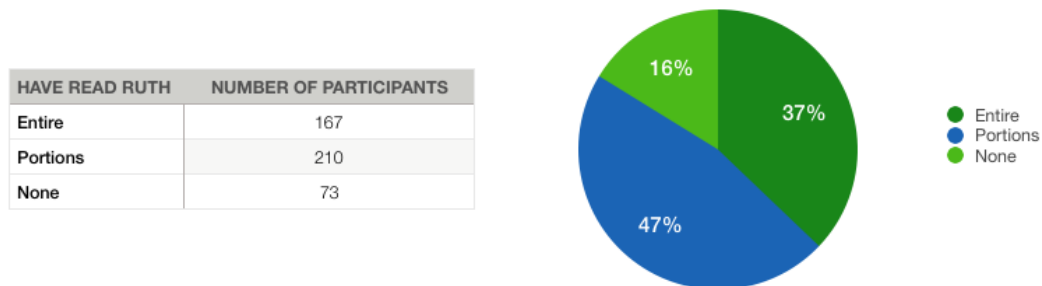


Table 7: Participants' reading rate

Among those who have read the book either entirely or a portion of it, 258 participants thought that the story in the book of Ruth is reflecting the relationship



between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law whereas 72 thought that it is a story of a widow who remarried.

181 participants knew that Boaz was a relative of Naomi's husband whereas 69 thought that he was Naomi's relative and 93 did not have any idea who he was.

### Understanding of 'Havana Mahavotra' in the Malagasy Context

On one hand, 403 responses were received to determine the understanding of *havana*. Here below is the details of how the participants understood the concept.

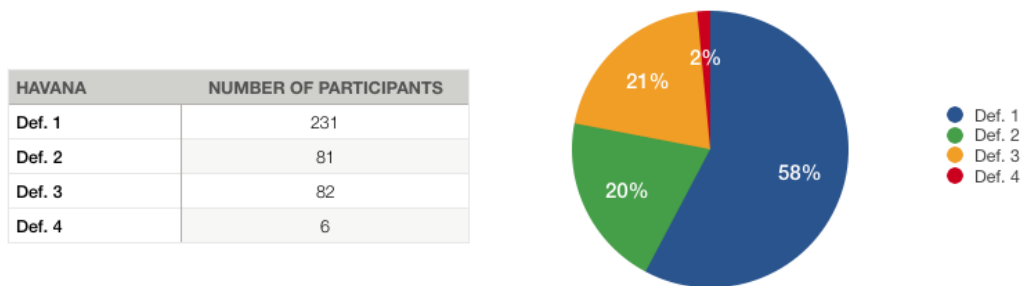


Table 8: Understanding of HAVANA

Def. 1: someone from the same ancestors or blood-related

Def. 2: those who are from the same country or region

Def. 3: a close friend

Def. 4: someone older for whom one needs to use uncle or aunt in front of his/her name.

On the other hand, 423 responses were received regarding the understanding of *mahavotra*, as detailed below.

MAHAVOTRA	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Def. 1	389
Def. 2	20
Def. 3	4
Def. 4	10

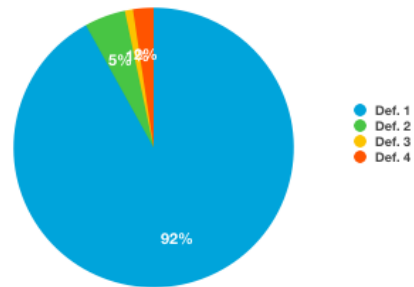


Table 9: Understanding of MAHAVOTRA

Def. 1: to be able to save or to rescue in times of troubles

Def. 2: to be wealthy

Def. 3: to be older in the society

Def. 4: various interpretations

375 participants out of 453 expressed their understanding of *havana mahavotra*.

The responses were so diverse that it is not possible to group them. The common idea in all of the responses was that it is someone who is there to come to the aid of someone in difficulty. The person can be a relative or not, and wealthy or not.

The last question was asking the opinion of the participants about whether they think that the Malagasy audience understands *havana mahavotra* or not. 376 feed-backs were received out of 453: 263 thought that readers don't understand it and 113 thought the opposite.

Therefore, in this case here, the translation of *havana mahavotra* is ambiguous since it does not give a clue about whether the person is a friend or a relative, nor does it give a clear information on the role of the person.

### **Conclusion**

In the first part of this chapter, the focus was the semantic studies of *havana* and its meaning in the local culture. A close look was given to how *mahavotra* was formed, its meaning, and the expected outcome for its function as an adjective. These two studies led to the semantic problems of *havana mahavotra*.

The second part focused on the analysis of the questionnaire established to determine the Malagasy audience's understanding of *havana mahavotra* in the book of Ruth. The findings in this part will lead to the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### POSSIBLE TRANSLATIONS OF לָאָל IN RUTH

#### Introduction

לָאָל is a concept that is tied to culture and applies only to men. The concept implies obligations and responsibilities towards a relative. Apart from the story of Tamar in Genesis 38, the story of Ruth is the only one in the Bible where לָאָל is practised in marriage.

This chapter will present how לָאָל is understood in the Malagasy context through its translation in the book of Ruth. As the paper looks into a better solution for its rendering considering the context of the original audience and the Malagasy one, some guidelines on translation from different authors will be considered in order to back-up the proposed solution.

#### Communicative Translation

Semantics is concerned with meaning and meaning and context are connected. Barnwell confirms that the context provides the clue for knowing the sense of a word in its particular occurrence.<sup>1</sup> The difference in cultural contexts of the source language and the target language leads to different interpretation of the meaning of a word like לָאָל. Yet, even though the original cultural context and the translation's cultural context are

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Barnwell, *Introduction to Semantics and Translation*, 2nd ed. (Horsleys Green: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1980), 21.

separated by time and space, the original text cannot be separated from its context. That is why semantic translation is applied.

Talking about text and context, Sim explains that the reader's understanding of what a text communicates depends on the reader's context. That context is something that he knows before starting reading and constructs his reading.<sup>2</sup> And he confirms that “firstly, information that fails to connect with the audience's current context cannot combine with any existing assumption to produce a contextual effect. Secondly, information that is already strongly known cannot strengthen the existing assumption, and will have no cognitive effect. Thirdly, information that is manifestly untrue (in the audience's opinion) contradicts but cannot displace existing strong assumptions.”<sup>3</sup>

Newmark gives a clear and simple explanation of the difference between communicative translation and semantic translation. He writes,

Communicative translation addresses itself solely to the second reader, who does not anticipate difficulties or obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language when necessary... Semantic translation remains within the original culture and assists the reader only in its connotations if they constitute the essential human (non-ethnic) message of the text.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald J. Sim, *Retelling Translation: A Handbook for Translators. Volume 1: Foundations*. (Pre-publication draft. Draft 2A, 2004), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Sim, *Retelling Translation*, 69.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Newmark, *Approaches to Translation* (Hertfordshire, UK: Pheonix ELT, 1995), 39.

## Grammatical Meaning in Translation: Case of the Malagasy Language

Nida and Taber see the importance of grammar analysis to explore the meaningful relationship between words.<sup>5</sup> The authors continue that the same grammatical construction may have many different meanings. They define four semantic categories that are found in all languages: object, event, abstract, and relation. A word is assigned to a category depending on the context in which that word is used. They argue that “it is important to realize that there is a kind of “fit” between these semantic categories and certain grammatical classes.”<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the Malagasy language, syntax coupled with the context plays an important role in translation. The basic forms of a sentence are either Predicate – Object – Subject when the predicate is a verb or sometimes an adjective, or Predicate – Subject when the predicate is a concrete noun or an adjective.<sup>7</sup> The meaning of the sentence lies heavily on the predicate and the context.

E.g.: *Milalao baolina Rakoto.* (Predicate [Verb] – Object - Subject)

Play    ball    Rakoto

→ Rakoto is playing a ball (meaning 1)

→ Rakoto knows how to play with the ball (meaning 2 with an implicit information)

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation: Helps for Translators* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969), 34.

<sup>6</sup> Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 35-39.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Bruno Rabenilaina and Jean-Yves Morin, *Vitasoa* (Antananarivo: Editions Ambozontany, 2015), 13.

→ Rakoto is in the field with his friends and they are playing foot-ball

(meaning 3 with an implicit information)

*Masaka ny vary.* (Predicate [Adjective] - Subject)

Ripe / cooked the rice

→ The rice is ripe / ready to be harvested. (meaning 1 – the context is the rice-field)

→ The rice is cooked / ready to be served. (meaning 2 - the context is cooking)

In all circumstances, affixes are the main grammatical players when attached to a word, considered as a root. Affixes change the class of a word or the voice and/or mood of the verb.

E.g.: *lalao* (game) is the root → noun

*ki + lalao* → toy(s) → noun

*mi + lalao* → to play (active voice: can be transitive or intransitive, depending on the context)

*lalao + (v)ina* → to be played (passive voice)

*i + lalao + (v)ana* → with which one plays (relative voice)

*fi + lalao + (v)ana* → adverbial: locative or instrumental, depending on the context

*lalao + (v)y* → play (imperative)

*mampi + lalao* → to make one play (causative)

*Remark:* in the case of the root *lalao*, the presence of (v) with the suffix is required because the root ends with two vowels that do not form a diphthong and the succession of three vowels is not accepted.

This is just a simple example of how important grammar is in bringing information to a word according to the context in which it is used.

Another complexity of the Malagasy language is number and gender. Verbs do not express or carry number in Malagasy. Number is expressed in either demonstratives or numerals. Most of the time, it is only within a context that the addressee can determine if the communicator means singular or plural.

E.g. *Misy mpianatra ao an-dakilasy.*

exist student LOC in-class

→ There is a student in the classroom. OR There are students in the classroom.

*Tsara tarehy ireto voninkazo ireto.*

good face DEM.PL flower DEM.PL

→ These flowers are pretty

*Manana akoho dimy Raso.*

PRES-have chicken five Raso

→ Raso has five chickens.

Gender is also not found in the Malagasy language. There is no distinction between masculine and feminine in a sentence. Actually, we only find gender with Mr.,



Mrs., and Miss. Apart from these three titles, if one wants to put an emphasis on the gender, then one must mention *lahy* ‘male’ or *vavy* ‘female’. The exception is with the third singular personal pronoun where the context alone can show if it is masculine or feminine and the addition of *lahy* or *vavy* is just impossible.

E.g.: *Mitomany ilay ankizy.*

cry det. child

→ The child is crying.

*Mitomany ilay ankizivavy.*

cry det. child.female

→ The girl is crying.

*Mitomany izy.*

cry 3SG

→ He/She is crying.

When translating using the Malagasy language as a source language or a target language, each morpheme attached to the root of a word carries a grammatical value that the translator cannot skip. For a good translation that communicates well to the target audience, sentence structure is also a factor that needs to be considered because the basic structure of the language grammatically is Verb – Object – Subject, which is often very different from Western and African languages.

The complexity of the syntax in the Malagasy language creates its wealth and gives the translator the opportunity to explore the language before translating either from Malagasy to another language or vice-versa. This means that the translator has to face the

tension between the two languages at the grammatical level because the grammar has to be interpreted, not only on a general level but in what makes the original language and the target language constructions distinctive.<sup>8</sup>

### A Few Renderings of לָצַל in the Old Testament

Levirate marriage and redemption of the land are mainly to be performed by the closest man to the one whose לָצַל he was. As we saw in the previous chapter, in Ruth alone, the same word was translated differently at different times in Malagasy.

The root לָצַל is used 115 times in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup> When it is used as a verb, *manavotra* is the translation that is used. But Genesis 48:16 is an exception where the verb לָצַל was rendered as a noun.

*Ary ilay Anjely izay Mpamonjy ahy tamin'ny loza rehetra*

→ and the Angel that (is) Saviour me from danger all

→ And the Angel that is my Saviour from all dangers

→ the Angel who has delivered me from all harm (NIV)

→ l'ange qui m'a délivré de tout mal (FC)

On the one hand, the word *loza* requires the use of either the noun *mpamonjy* or the verb *mamonjy* because obviously, there are dangers and the person needs to be saved from them. On the other hand, the verb 'to deliver' in English and 'délivrer' in French is

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<sup>8</sup> Newmark, *Approaches to Translation*, 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> Occurrences of לָצַל, ParaText 7.5.100.87

translated into *manafaka* in Malagasy. It is used when someone or something is caught and tied up literally or figuratively, and needs to be freed.

When *havana* goes with the genitive *havana*, *havana havana* is translated 'the avenger of blood' in English, *l'homme chargé de venger* (the man who is to avenge - my translation) in French, and *mpamaly ra* (the one who pays the blood back – the avenger of blood) in Malagasy, just as what we see in Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, Joshua 20, and in 2 Samuel 14:11.

### **The Roles of the *havana* in the Context of Ruth**

The book of Ruth alone does not give us any idea of who *havana* might be and the roles of *havana* in the community.

When Maclaren wrote on *kinsman-redeemer* in his Expositions of Holy Scripture, he stated that “the *go'el* must be the nearest blood relation of the person whose *go'el* he was. He might be brother, or less nearly related, but this was essential, that of all living men, he was the most closely connected.”<sup>10</sup> In the same article, he wrote that the main parts of the duty of the *havana* are “to buy back the alienated land, to purchase the freedom of the man who had voluntarily sold himself as a slave, and to avenge the slaying of a kinsman.”<sup>11</sup> The explanation of the first two duties are in Leviticus 25 and the last one in Number 35. In fact, Leviticus 25:47-49 gives a distinct order of procession that the *havana* must be a brother first, then an uncle, then a cousin, and finally any blood relative.

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander Maclaren, *The Kinsman-Redeemer*, accessed November 10, 2017, [http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions\\_of\\_holy\\_scripture\\_h/the\\_kinsman-redeemer.htm](http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions_of_holy_scripture_h/the_kinsman-redeemer.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Maclaren, *The Kinsman-Redeemer*.

According to Bascom,

a *go'el* at times will rescue an individual, or avenge him or her, or take restitution for a wrong done to someone under his protection (in a patriarchy, a *go'el* would certainly be a male). A *go'el* owed *tsedaqah* [righteousness] to the one under his protection, and the protected one owed *emunah* [loyalty] to his or her *go'el*, as well as hoping for *emunah* from him. If a *go'el* showed *hesed* (translated as “kindness” in some languages) [covenant love, commitment], then one was truly fortunate.<sup>12</sup>

What is here in Ruth is partly a redemption of the land and partly a redemption of the widow.

It is clear in Ruth 3:12 that Boaz realized that there was another man closer to Naomi and Ruth than him to fulfill the duty of the *גֹּאֵל* towards them. Obviously, neither the man nor Boaz was one of the closest relatives like a brother, an uncle, or a first cousin or Naomi would have mentioned that to Ruth in chapter 3 verse 2. Yet, by mentioning that Boaz is a kinsman of theirs, Naomi knew the extent of her husband's family and knew that there was a possibility of Boaz redeeming their land and taking Ruth as a wife.

In his wisdom, Boaz did not accept Ruth's request in chapter 3 verse 9 right away. Even if he liked her, he let her know about the closer kinsman that they cannot skip.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Bascom, “The Role of Culture in Translation,” in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, ed. Timothy Wilt (Manchester: St. Jerome's Press, 2003), 12.

## Possible Interpretations of לִנְדָּה in the Book of Ruth

לִנְדָּה in the book of Ruth is interpreted in different ways. Gutt indicates that “the difference in interpretation would be due to the difference in the contextual information used in the interpretation process.”<sup>13</sup>

The following are a few examples of interpretations of לִנְדָּה in the book of Ruth. In the interlinear translations, the comparison of the dynamic translation of the Malagasy version into English with the NIV version was adopted.

Ruth 2:20

*Havantsika akaiky ihany Ralehilahy, koa isan' izay mahavotra  
antsika izy.*

our relative close quite the man therefore among those who are able to  
redeem us(excl.) he

→ The man is our quite close relative, therefore he is among those who can redeem us.

NIV: “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”

In this sentence, the translators chose the meaning “those who are able to redeem” to translate לִנְדָּה. If the sense of “to redeem” as “to save” is considered, then the question would be “to save from what?” The interpretation of “to redeem” here could be “to save from poverty.” The understanding of the sentence would then be “Since Boaz is a rich man and he is a quite close relative, he cannot refuse to help us.”

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<sup>13</sup> Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2000), 76.

Ruth 3:9

*Mba rakofy ny lambanao ny mpanompovavinao, fa havana  
mahavotra ianao.*

please cover with the your cloth the your servant because relative who is able to  
redeem you

→ Please cover your servant with your cloth because you are a relative who is able to  
redeem.

NIV: “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.”

Here, אָחַי was translated as *havana mahavotra*, a relative who is able to redeem.

The meaning here is “a relative who is able to save.” But the question still remains, to  
save from what? The reader may guess that there is a connection between “to cover  
someone with one's cloth” and “being a relative” but *mahavotra* may be interpreted as  
“rich.” That would still take us back to the previous interpretation “to save from poverty,”  
and the understanding of the sentence would be “because you are a rich relative, [you  
have a lot of clothes], give me (your servant) some of your clothes.” This interpretation is  
linked with the introduction of Boaz in chapter 2:1 that he is “a man of standing,”  
translated as *lehilahy mpanjatobe*, “a very rich man,” in Malagasy.

Ruth 3:12-13

*Ankehitriny, marina fa havana mahavotra aho,*

now true that relative who is able to redeem I

→ Now it is true that I am a relative who can redeem

*nefa misy havana mahavotra akaiky kokoa noho izaho*

but there is relative who is able to redeem closer than me

→ but there is a relative who can redeem that is closer than I am

*raha hanavotra anao izy dia tsara izany, aoka izy no hanavotra  
anao;*

if will redeem you he then good that let him will redeem  
you

→ if he redeems you then that is good, let him redeem you

*fa raha toa ka tsy hanao izany (hanavotra) izy*

but if not will do that (will redeem) he

→ but if he will not do that then

*dia izaho no hanavotra anao.*

then I will redeem you

→ I will redeem you

NIV: Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I

... if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, ..., I will do it.

In these two verses, Boaz acknowledges that he is a relative that can redeem or save but there is another one that is closer to the family that would have precedence over him. The other person has the priority in the decision making (redeeming); if he refuses, then Boaz would take over.

The idea of redeeming here could be logically interpreted as “helping,” taking into account the background that Boaz is a rich man; he is a relative; he is expected to be able to help. Ruth and Naomi are poor widows; they need help; they expect the help to come from rich people; they solicit Boaz's help.

Ruth 4:1

...     *indro nandalo ilay havana mahavotra voalazany*  
          here   passed by   the   relative   who is able to redeem he mentioned

→ here passed by the relative who is able to redeem that he had mentioned

NIV: the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along

This is exactly the same as in chapter 3 verse 12. This is a continuation of the story, so the interpretation is also the same as in that verse.

Ruth 4:3

*Dia niteny tamin' ilay havana mpanavotra izy*  
          then   said           to PAST   the   relative   redeemer   he

→ Then he said to the relative redeemer

NIV: Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer



Surprisingly, there is a sudden change here. This is the only instance in the whole book of Ruth that the noun “redeemer” is used as it is. Was it a lack of attention by the translators? Or was it intentional? Can it be assumed that the anonymous person's job is to redeem? These are simple but hard questions to answer because there is no way to know the translators' answers. The possible interpretation here is that the person is a relative whose role in the society is habitually to redeem.

After Boaz's transaction with the other man, the next thing is Boaz's announcement to the elders and all the people that he had bought from Naomi the property of Naomi's husband and sons. The problem is the relationship between “to buy” and “to redeem.” In English, the relationship between the two verbs can be figured out because of the price required to pay for the redemption of something or someone. The use of the verb “to buy” is straightforward but brings confusion to the Malagasy reader because earlier, everything was about “to redeem.” In Malagasy, the payment of a price only occurs when the object had belonged to the person but was sold to another, so he wants to buy it back or to redeem it, which is not the case here.

Then Boaz talks about taking Ruth as a wife. According to the Lexham Bible Dictionary on Redemption,

Boaz's marriage to the widow Ruth is often understood as a kinsman-redeemer act. However, according to the law, marriage was not a role for a kinsman-redeemer. A more likely explanation is that since there was no male heir for Elimelech's land, the redemption of property triggered the levirate law (Deuteronomy 25:5–10) so that the name of Elimelech could be raised up on his property (Ruth 4:5, 10). The concept of redemption is

understood in its broader sense of restoration of name on family property, along with restoration of Ruth and Naomi's well-being.<sup>14</sup>

### **Problem 1: Unknown Concept**

The main problem in the translation of *לְקַח* is that it is an unknown concept to the Malagasy people. That leads the reader into misinterpretation. The verb “to redeem” and the nouns “redeemer” and “redemption” exist but used in the spiritual domain, not in relation to property or marriage. Nowadays, things once sold cannot be bought back anymore.

In the Malagasy culture, when the spouse dies, the property would belong automatically to the widow or the widower and their children are the heirs. Alternatively it would go to the family of the deceased person if there was no spouse or children.

Another case of heritage distribution is when the widow or the widower would be left with nothing and would have to restart his/her life again because of the customs of the people group where the deceased person was from. Such customs require that when one of the couple dies, all their belonging, including their children, would go to the deceased person's family.

There are also cases when the couple's will recorded in their marriage certificate is respected. A widow or a widower has the freedom to re-marry or to remain single, yet, most people would choose the latter.

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Lau, “Redemption,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. J. D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos version.

On the one hand, a widower is expected to be able to take care of his own children. On the other hand, if a widow has problems or is in need, her brothers are expected to help and take care of her. Thus the saying, *fara-vady, anadahy*, lit. “the brother is the last husband.”

## **Problem 2: Semantic Problems**

As seen previously, in the context of Ruth in Malagasy, *go'el* was translated as *havana mahavotra*.

*Havana* means “relative.” The idea of a relative does not necessarily mean that the two people are blood-relatives. Good friends are also called relatives, and so are people from the same village or from the same people group. Outside Madagascar, when Malagasy people meet, even if it is for the first time, they feel that tie of being relatives because they are from the same country. Yet, in the book of Ruth, the concept of “kinsman-redeemer” suggests that the redeemer and the one to be redeemed are relatives because the redeemer and the deceased man were brothers or cousins. Although *havana* can be used here, the expression *havana mahavotra* does not give us a clue about whether the person is a friend or a relative.

The other ambiguity is in the second part of the expression: *mahavotra/ mpanavotra*. There is no way to detect the reason why the translators changed *mahavotra* into *mpanavotra* in Ruth 4:3 or the reason why *mpanavotra* was not used from the beginning. As mentioned earlier, there is a big difference between “the one who is able to redeem” and “the redeemer.”

### Problem 3: Grammatical Problems

The grammatical problem with *havana mahavotra* lies with *mahavotra*. In our case here, it cannot be a verb. It is then an adjective that qualifies *havana*.

*Mahavotra*, to be able to save or to redeem can be used as an active verb. At the same time, it can also be used as an adjective. The problem is that it is not flexible and the rule stated by Rajemisa-Raolison about substituting *f-* to *m-* to an adjective with an active verb form with the prefix *maha-* does not work here.<sup>15</sup>

$m\text{-}ahavotra \rightarrow f\text{-}ahavotra (*)$

The sign (\*) shows that the word does not carry any meaning

Here, *fahavotra* does not carry any meaning.

On the other hand, the meaning of the potential prefix *maha-* that we have here is “to be able to” which expresses a possibility and a future action. When *maha-* is changed into *man-*, we get an active verb: *manavotra*. The use of the prefix *man-* shows that the action is happening at the time of speaking. In this case, the change of the active verb into an adjective is possible when substituting *f-* with *m-* and by adding the suffix *-ana* at the end.<sup>16</sup> Thus we have

$m\text{-}anavotra \rightarrow f\text{-}anavot(ra)\text{-}ana$

to save/redeem  $\rightarrow$  salvation/redemption

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<sup>15</sup> Régis Rajemisa-Raolison, *Grammaire Malgache* (Antananarivo: Imprimerie Catholique, 1961), 26.

<sup>16</sup> Rajemisa-Raolison, *Grammaire Malgache*, 26.

The question is then whether to use *mahavotra* or *manavotra* to qualify *havana* if the meaning can be applied in the context of the book of Ruth.

### **Evaluation of the Questionnaire on האל**

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire has 7 questions. The first part focuses on the participants' familiarity with the book of Ruth, the second part on the understanding of *havana mahavotra*, and the last question asks for suggestions on how to best render האל in Malagasy.

The focus of this evaluation is on the second part of the questionnaire: questions 4 to 6. At the end of each question, the participant has the opportunity to express his own understanding of either *havana*, *mahavotra* or *havana mahavotra*.

Question 4 asks for the participant's understanding of *havana*. Apart from being blood-related, most answers revolve around a close friend who can give you a hand in difficult times and whom you can trust.

Question 5 is about *mahavotra*. To many, it means “to be able to help in times of need or who can give you good advice in difficult times.”

Question 6 concerns the understanding of *havana mahavotra*. The received answers can be grouped into three categories. The first category focuses on *havana mahavotra* as blood-related people who can help each other in difficult times and to whom other relatives can go to when needed. The next category is those who are close to you, like close friends, who are always there for you and never leave you alone. You can

share your life with them. And the last category is those who are not necessarily related to you but support you in one way or another so that you live a happy life, like church-mates, house-helps...

Therefore, there is only a very small relation to the real meaning of *lolo* and people's understanding of its translation in Malagasy.

### **Solution: Culture and Context**

Richardson explains that *lolo* is a family or relatives under the protection of the eldest son or of a guardian after the death of the father, or whose parents are poor.<sup>17</sup>

Rajemisa-Raolison adds that the act of supporting a close relative in need is called *mizaka lolo*. And when there is a close relative who is in need and you are under the obligation to support the person, the relative is called *lolo aman'entana*.<sup>18</sup> From this explanation, a *lolo* is not necessarily a widow or a widower but simply a relative in need.

The concept of levirate marriage is understood in the Malagasy society. Remarriage of a widow or a widower is accepted. Levirate marriage is called *vady lolo* or “carrying a spouse on the head” (my literal translation).<sup>19</sup> In the Malagasy context, levirate can be applied to both a widow and a widower. The only condition is that the one who marries the widow or the widower must be a close relative like a sibling or a first cousin of the deceased person. In such a situation, the widow or the widower is called

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<sup>17</sup> J. Richardson, “Lolo,” in *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, 398.

<sup>18</sup> Rajemisa-Raolison, “Lolo,” in *Rakibolana Malagasy*, 546.

<sup>19</sup> *vady* = spouse, *lolo* = carrying something on the head

*vady entina loloha* or “a spouse that is carried on the head” (my literal translation) and the one that marries her or him is called *vady mitondra loloha* or “a spouse that carries his/her spouse on the head” (my literal translation). The main function of the *vady mitondra loloha* is to continue the alliance established in the first marriage.<sup>20</sup> In other words, he/she takes care of everything left by the deceased person: the spouse, the children, and the possession. But levirate marriage is not a requirement unless it was agreed by the two families at the time of engagement that if one of the couple dies young, then the remaining spouse would stay with the deceased person's family and would remarry someone from the same family.<sup>21</sup>

The concept of levirate as *vady loloha* can be applied in the book of Ruth. To Boaz, Ruth was not a simple *vady entina loloha*. When he was talking to the other <sup>אֲחֵי</sup> who was closer to Naomi's family than him, after the man agreed to take the land, he made it clear that the <sup>אֲחֵי</sup> is under the obligation to marry Ruth, meaning that Ruth was a *loloha aman'entana*. She was a widow of a cousin, and she is poor so the closest relative is under the obligation to support her by marrying her and providing for her needs, as well as to keep the name of the deceased cousin by giving her sons. Whereas, Boaz was Ruth's *vady mitondra loloha* because he is the one fulfilling the responsibilities of the <sup>אֲחֵי</sup> towards her.

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<sup>20</sup> Nelly Rakotobe et al., *L'Union Conjugale en Imerina*, 10, accessed August 19, 2016, [http://madare-vues.recherches.gov.mg/IMG/pdf/cahier-coutume9\\_1\\_.pdf](http://madare-vues.recherches.gov.mg/IMG/pdf/cahier-coutume9_1_.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Fitomiandalana, *Ny Fanambadiana Malagasy Anivon-tany* (Antananarivo: Brentch Mbolamasoandro, 2016), 36.

In the following, propositions for the translation of לָאֵל will be given in the table of the 21 occurrences of לָאֵל in the book of Ruth.

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic	Proposition
2:20	לָאֵל	kinsman-redeemer	être chargé de prendre soin de quelqu'un	(havana) mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra	(havana) afaka hizaka loloha
						(a relative) who will be able to support another relative in need
3:9	לָאֵל	kinsman-redeemer	avoir la responsabilité d'un proche parent à l'égard de quelqu'un	havana mahavotra	havana mahazo manavotra	havana afaka hizaka loloha
						a relative who will be able to support another relative in need
3:12	לָאֵל	near of kin	avoir la responsabilité d'un proche parent à l'égard de quelqu'un	havana mahavotra	mahazo manavotra (active verb)	havana afaka hizaka loloha



Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic	Proposition
						a relative who will be able to support another relative in need
	גֹּאֵל	kinsman-redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	<i>not translated</i>	<i>no translation needed</i>
3:13	ga'al יִגְאֹלֶה	redeem (verb-cond.)	exercer une responsabilité é à l'égard de quelqu'un	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra	hizaka loloha
						to be able to support a relative in need
	ga'al יִגְאֹלֶה	redeem (verb-inf.)	(exercer une responsabilité é à l'égard de quelqu'un)	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra	hizaka loloha
						to be able to support a relative in need
	ga'al יִגְאֹלֶה	(redeem) (verb-inf.)	(exercer une responsabilité é à l'égard de quelqu'un)	(hanavotra) (verb-FUT)	hanavotra	<i>no translation needed</i>
	ga'al יִגְאֹלֶה	(redeem) (verb-FUT)	exercer une responsabilité é à l'égard de quelqu'un	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra	hizaka loloha
						to be able to support a relative in need

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic	Proposition
4:1	גֹּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra	havana afaka hizaka loloha
						a relative who will be able to support another relative in need
4:3	גֹּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mpanavotr a	(havana) mahazo manavotra	havana afaka hizaka loloha
						a relative who will be able to support another relative in need
4:4	<i>ga'al</i> תִּגְאֹל	redeem (verb- FUT)	exercer le droit de rachat	hanavotra (verb- FUT)	hanavotra (verb-FUT)	hanavotra
						redeem (verb- FUT)
	<i>ga'al</i> גָּאֵל	(redeem) (verb- impv.)	(exercer le droit de rachat)	avoty (verb- impv.)	avoty (verb- impv.)	avoty
						redeem (verb-impv.)
	<i>ga'al</i> יִגְאֹל	(redeem) (verb- FUT)	<i>not translated</i>	hanavotra (verb- FUT)	(hanavotra) (verb- FUT)	hanavotra
						redeem (verb- FUT)

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic	Proposition
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגַאֵל	<i>not translated</i>	<i>not translated</i>	hanavotra (verb- FUT)	olona mahazo manavotra	hanavotra
						redeem (verb- FUT)
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגַאֵל	redeem (verb- FUT)	acheter	hanavotra (verb- FUT)	hanavotra (verb- FUT)	hanavotra
						redeem (verb- FUT)
4:6	גֵּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra	havana afaka hizaka loloha
						a relative who will be able to support another relative in need
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגַאֵל	redeem	<i>not translated</i>	manavotra (verb- PRES)	manavotra (verb- PRES)	mitondra loloha
						to marry the brother's widow in order to continue the family line
	<i>ga'al</i> לְגַאֵל inf. construct	redeem (verb- impv.)	exercer le droit de rachat	avoty (verb- impv.)	manavotra (verb- inf.)	avoty
						redeem (verb-impv.)

Passage	Hebrew	NIV	Français Courant	Malagasy Protestant	Malagasy Catholic	Proposition
	<i>ga'al</i> גֹּאֵל	redeem (verb- impv.)	exercer le droit de rachat	mahavotra (verb- PRES)	manavotra (verb- PRES)	mahavotra
						redeem (verb-PRES)
4:8	גֹּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	(havana) mahazo manavotra	havana afaka hizaka loloha
						a relative who will be able to support another relative in need
4:14	גֹּאֵל	kinsman- redeemer	<i>not translated</i>	havana mahavotra	mpanavotra	havana mitondra loloha
						a relative who marries his brother's widow in order to continue the family line

Table 10: Proposed translations of גֹּאֵל

Where needed, *havana* was always used in the translation because it is neutral. Although there are a few definitions of *havana* in Malagasy, as we saw previously, the context of the story gives us a clue that Boaz was a relative. Ruth 2:1 tells us that he is from the clan of Elimelech (Naomi's husband). And Naomi confirms in Ruth 3:2 that he is a kinsman of theirs.

When the concept focuses on the responsibility of taking care for someone in need, then *afaka hizaka loloha* was chosen for the translation. *Afaka* is followed by a future tense marked by *h-* which substitutes *m-* in the present tense because it shows the ability of the person to fulfill his responsibility.

When the concept revolves around the act of buying the land back, *manavotra*, “to redeem,” and its derivatives were kept.

Lastly, when the concept is about not only the responsibility of taking care for someone in need but to take her as a wife as well, then *mitondra loloha* was chosen in the translation.

Therefore, to translate *הָאָהָבָה* as *havana mahavotra* is very vague and obscure. The translator needs to pay more attention to the details of the original context and the context of the audience for their choice of words in order to convey the real meaning of the concept and to stay faithful to the original.

It is important that the translation be faithful to the original text and context. Context is very important in order to get the right meaning of a concept. *הָאָהָבָה* is one of the many unknown concepts in the Bible to the Malagasy people. It is obvious that “the translator cannot offer the same amount and kind of information as the source-text producer. What the translator does is offer another kind of information in another form.”<sup>22</sup>

Yet, the translators need to have a grasp of the text and context background and need to be able to communicate the intended meaning of the original text into the target

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<sup>22</sup> Christiane Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), 35.

language. Such lack of knowledge affects the communication, and therefore, the translation.

Part of understanding the context is also understanding the cognitive environment of the society where the story took place and the one of the receptors. As Sim explains, “A reteller has to understand the original – that is, he has access to the originally intended context, and successfully infers the intended interpretation of the original. Secondly, he has to decide his informative intention in retelling it to the new audience.”<sup>23</sup>

Contextualization sometimes results in the creation or formation of a new word or a new expression in the target language. For an unknown concept to the receptors, either for a new word or a new expression, a definition is needed. “It can be regarded as a statement of a semantic relationship between a concept (X) being defined and one or more other concepts (Y), presumed to be known to the hearer (reader), and having properties considered relevant to the term being defined.”<sup>24</sup>

In the case here, to contextualize *lax* into Malagasy means that the term itself needs to be explained. That would not be a translation but an explanation. Therefore, the best rendering at the moment is to use the term that already exists and adapt it to the text in order to convey a big part of the intended meaning.

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<sup>23</sup> Ronald J. Sim, *Retelling Translation: A Handbook for Translators. Volume 1: Foundations* (Pre-publication draft. Draft 2A, 2004), 87.

<sup>24</sup> David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 162.

## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE IN MALAGASY

### FANADIHADIANA

1 – Efa namaky ny bokin'i Rota ve ianao?

- Eny, izy manontolo
- Eny, ampahany betsaka
- Eny, andininy vitsivitsy
- Tsia, tsy mbola namaky

2 – Milaza inona ho anao ny bokin'i Rota?

- Tantaram-pitiavana
- Fifandraisan'ny rafozam-bavy sy ny vinantovavy
- Vehivavy manano-tena manambady fanindroany
- Tantara tsotra
- Hafa: \_\_\_\_\_

3 – Tamin'ianao namaky ny bokin'i Rota, iza moa i Boaza?

- Havan'i Naomy
- Havan'i Rota
- Havan'ny vadin'i Naomy
- Mpiara-monina tamin'i Naomy sy ny fianakaviany
- Hafa: \_\_\_\_\_

4 – Nantsoina hoe “havana mahavotra” i Boaza ao anatin'ny tantara. Inona no dikan'ny hoe “havana” ho anao?

- iray fihaviana / iray firenena
- iray razana niandohana / iray rà
- namana tena akaiky
- olona zoky amin'ny taona ka tsy antsoina amin'ny anarany
- Hafa: \_\_\_\_\_

5 – Inona kosa ny dikan'ny “mahavotra”?

- manankarena / manan-katao
- matanjaka, manam-pahefana, atahorana
- zoky amin'ny taona
- afaka mamonjy amin'ny fotoan-tsarotra
- Hafa: \_\_\_\_\_

6 – Raha ny Baiboly Malagasy FOTSINY no vakianao, ahoana ny fahazoanao ny hoe “havana mahavotra”?

7 – Araka ny hevitrao, azon'ny mpamaky ve ny atao hoe “havana mahavotra” ao amin'ny bokin'i Rota?

- ☐ Eny                      ☐ Tsia

Raha TSIA, inona ny soso-kevitrao ho entina milaza azy io?

## MOMBA ANAO

☐ Lehilahy ☐ Vehivavy

Taona:

- ☐ latsaky ny 18 taona  
☐ 18 – 25 taona  
☐ 26 – 35 taona  
☐ mihoatra ny 35 taona

Fianarana norantovina / kilasy farany nisy anao:

*Fanamarihana hafa tianao hatao:*

==.-.-.-.-.-MISAOTRA TOMPOKO!.-.-.-.-.-==



## **APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH**

**(free translation of the Malagasy version)**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

1 – Have you read the book of Ruth?

- Yes, the whole book
- Yes, a big part of it
- Yes, a few verses
- No, I haven't

2 – What does the book of Ruth tell you?

- A love story
- A relationship between mother-in law and daughter-in law
- A remarried widow
- A simple story
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3 – When you read the book, who was Boaz?

- A relative of Naomi
- A relative of Ruth
- A relative of Naomi's husband
- A neighbor of Naomi and her family
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4 – Boaz is called “havana mahavotra” in the story. What does “havana” mean to you?

- from the same country / area of origin
- from the same ancestors
- very close friend
- an older person that you cannot call by name
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5 – What does “mahavotra” mean to you?

- rich
- powerful, strong, authoritative
- older than you
- able to save you in times of difficulty
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6 – If you read the Malagasy Bible – ONLY – how do you understand “havana mahavotra”?

7 – According to you, is “havana mahavotra” in the book of Ruth understood by the readers?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If NO, what do you suggest would be the best rendering?

#### ABOUT YOU

☐ Male ☐ Female

Age:

- under 18 years old
- 18 – 25 years old
- 26 – 35 years old
- above 35 years old

Studies / last grade you attended:

*Other remarks that you want to make:*

==--THANK YOU!--==

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